6-1-1960

# Samuel Taylor Coleridge's opium addiction and its influence on five of his major poems

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# SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE'S OPIUM ADDICTION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON FIVE OF HIS MAJOR POEMS

by

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English

University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

June 1960





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# PREFACE

In 1789 a young man of seventeen was trying his hand at poetry, choosing (as young men do) the subject "Life" for one of his first endeavors. To young Samuel Coleridge the world seemed full of promise; he suddenly seemed aware of "the glorious prospect" which lay before him. Life was delightful and engaging; it was an "infinite expanse" through which his "every step" would bring "new scenes of Wisdom. . . and Knowledge."

Yet, only thirteen years later, a man of thirty wrote:

> My genial spirits fail:
> And what can these avail
> To lift the smothering weight from
> off my breast?
> It were a vain endeavour,
> Though I should gaze for ever
> On that green light that lingers
> in the west. . .

From an eagerness for life and joy in its promise, to the despondency of "Dejection: An Ode"--this was the change which marked Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Some years before, his creative genius had produced "Kubla Khan," "The Ancient Mariner," and "Christabel"; but the Coleridge of the years following the "Ode" was no longer the poet of 1798. With true insight Coleridge soon wrote to his friend Robert Southey: ". . .all my poetic genius is gone." Indeed, the change in outlook was more significant than a mere change in mood. "Dejection: An Ode" is a death

lament for one who had found in life not only the joys of Wisdom and Knowledge, but also the anguish of "the milk of paradise."

For Samuel Taylor Coleridge was an opium addict. This is not, as some would suggest, a fact which should serve as an excuse for sentimental eulogies nor self-righteous pity. Indeed, Coleridge created in spite of his addiction, and also because of it. Moreover, there need be no pity felt, nor indignation spent on one who produced "Kubla Khan," "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "Christabel," or "Dejection: An Ode"! Rather, the poet's opium addiction is a fact which should be recognized as the reader approaches Coleridge's poetry, for his drug habit would seem to be a significant influence on at least five of his major poems. It is this kind of analysis which the following pages attempt. "Kubla Khan," "The Ancient Mariner," "Christabel," "Dejection: An Ode," and "The Pains of Sleep" will each be discussed in terms of the poet's opium addiction; the chapter titles indicate the general relationship, and it is hoped that the succeeding material will make the specific influences readily apparent.

For their assistance in the preparation of this paper, I am grateful to

Dr. Ralph M. Wardle, Head of the Department of English, University of Omaha, who has given generously of his time and encouragement and whose comments have been always helpful but never arbitrary.

Karen B. Baker, my wife, who has listened to the problems, helped in their solution, and typed much of the final manuscript.

The Staff of the Gene Eppley Library, the Council Bluffs Public Library, and the University of Nebraska Medical School Library for their many courtesies.

B.P.B.

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. . . The self-same moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea . . .

# CHAPTER I

## "HE HAD ACQUIRED A HABIT"

In early November of the year 1791 young Samuel Coleridge sat in his room at Jesus College writing his brother George. The nineteen year old had been at residence in the Cambridge college less than two months, but already he was impressing his professors and fellow students with his ability and personality. He had come to the college on a scholarship which, he tells George, "will be worth to me 27 pounds a year." Moreover, Coleridge has heard of a "new regulation at our College" which excites his curiosity: "The man who takes the highest honour in his year of the candidates is to be elected Fellow," he writes. Evidently Samuel Coleridge intended to be that man, for he admits to George that "this will be a bit of a stimulus to my exertions." Thus, in spite of the dreary weather and intensive curriculum, Samuel Taylor Coleridge seemed to be enjoying himself during his first months at Jesus College. The only real trouble, he tells George, is that he has "a most violent cold in my head--a favour, which I owe to the dampness of my rooms."[1]

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[1]Earl L. Griggs, ed., Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (Oxford, 1956), I, 16. (Hereafter referred to as Collected Letters.)

On the twenty-eighth of that month Coleridge again wrote his brother and again complained of "a disagreeable tearing pain in my head when I move." And again he suggests that his "rheumatism" is probably due to the "dampness of my room." A rather startling sentence follows immediately: "Opium never used to have any disagreeable effects on me--but it has on many."[1]

In the abundance of sources now known, this passing remark seems to be the first time Coleridge mentions the drug, which was to play so important a role in his life. The tone of the remark is casual and matter-of-fact, but the tense of the verb is startling indeed. Opium "never used" to have disagreeable effects, he says, and the indication is only too clear that Coleridge has tried opium before and, probably because of his rheumatic pains, is taking some now.

After this letter of late 1791 there are no references to opium in Coleridge's correspondence until March of 1796. For the intervening years, one can only speculate as to Coleridge's experiences with opium. Meyer Abrams, in his Milk of Paradise, speculates that Coleridge continued to use opium during the years 1791-95. He points out that Coleridge's subjection to pain and illness continued and thus "it is probable that the use of opium for relief

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[1]Collected Letters, I, 17.

continued as well."[1] Abrams' contention seems plausible, but the fact that Coleridge does not mention opium or laudanum in his letters would seem to indicate that, if he used it at all during this period, the extent of his indulgence was not very great.

One might at first assume that the absence of laudanum references in these years indicates an unwillingness on Coleridge's part to reveal his use of the drug. This would seem to be an unwise assumption, for Coleridge's next reference to the drug in a letter of 1796 is almost as casual in tone as that of the 1791 letter to George. Even in 1796 there is still no attempt to conceal his use of opium or to apologize for it. He writes, on March 12 of that year, to the Reverend John Edwards:

> Since I last wrote you, I have been tottering on the edge of madness--my mind overbalanced on the contra side of Happiness . . .I have been obliged to take Laudanum almost every night.[2]

At any rate, it is in this letter of 1796 that it becomes evident that Coleridge by this time is using opium more than occasionally; laudanum is now used "almost every night."

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[1]Meyer Howard Abrams, The Milk of Paradise (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1934), p. 54.

[2]Collected Letters, I, 188.

Of course, whether or not this nightly use of laudanum was prolonged enough to lead to Coleridge's actual addiction to the drug is, at best, speculation. It is Abrams' opinion that Coleridge was, indeed, addicted by this time.[1] Most medical authorities of today concede that "Addiction occurs after a variable period of time"[2] which depends upon "the amount and frequency of the dose and with the individual."[3] According to Doctor Charles E. Terry, many authorities say that "three weeks of regular use will generally fix the habit."[4] Doctor Louis Goodman, in his authoritative text-book on pharmacology, states that "it usually requires more than two weeks of repeated use of narcotics" to become addicted. He points out, however, that "addiction may develop in a few days and in some unstable personalities after only a few doses."[5]

It is, of course, practically impossible to ascertain exactly how much opium Coleridge was taking at any particular time in his life. However, since the tone of his references to the drug still seems anything but apologetic in the letters of 1796, it would seem fairly valid to assume that

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[1]Abrams, p. 59.

[2]Louis S. Goodman and Alfred Gilman, The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics (New York, 1955), p. 242.

[3]Elisabeth Schneider, Coleridge, Opium, and Kubla Khan (Chicago, 1953), p. 35.

[4]Charles E. Terry and Mildred Pellens, The Opium Problem (New York, 1928), p. 149.

[5]Goodman and Gilman, p. 242.

Coleridge's own statements as to the amount of laudanum he was taking at this early stage are trustworthy. In a letter to his friend Joseph Cottle dated November 5, 1796, Coleridge complains of a "blister" under his right ear. "I take laudanum every four hours, 25 drops each dose," he says.[1] It is here, then, that Coleridge first gives any indication of the amount of dosage.

It is difficult, however, to ascertain the significance of this statement; for the problem is further complicated by the lack of drug standardization in Coleridge's day. Even the famous "Opium-Eater," Thomas De Quincey, admits that in his day "opium itself--crude opium--varies enormously in purity and strength."[2] Still, in his Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, De Quincey "reckons 25 drops of laudanum as equivalent to one grain of opium" which, he believes, "is the common estimate."[3] Modern medicine usually reckons thirty drops of opium as a standard daily dosage; it is, moreover, this amount which is the basis for addiction occurring in no more than two to three weeks'

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[1]Earl Leslie Griggs, ed., Unpublished Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (New Haven, 1934), I, 59. (Hereafter referred to as Unpublished Letters.)

[2]Thomas De Quincey, The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (Everyman's Library edition; New York, 1907), pp. 180 and 200.

[3]Ibid., p. 201.

time. Hence, according to modern standards Coleridge was taking several times the daily dosage which usually leads to addiction in two to three weeks, but "may" cause it in a "few days," especially in "some unstable personalities."[1] Since the strength of the product was so variable in Coleridge's time, no really valid conclusion can be made on this particular evidence. Still, to suggest that Coleridge was probably addicted to opium in these latter months of 1796 seems more than just idle speculation.

A letter written to Thomas Poole in the late evening of November 5, 1796, again mentions the blister under Coleridge's ear and his practice of taking "25 drops of Laudanum every five hours." He mentions to Poole that on the preceding Wednesday night he was "seized with an intolerable pain" and "was nearly frantic." Moreover, "it continued. . .it came on. . .several times Thursday and began severer threats towards night," Coleridge continues. Hence, he "took between 60 and 70 drops of Laudanum." Much of this letter is, as Coleridge himself admits, "flighty" and rather incoherent, a fact which indicates that Coleridge was probably under the influence of the day's dose of laudanum. Still, he insists that his is not an "exaggerating

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[1]Goodman and Gilman, p. 242.

account." Since the more orderly and more coherent letter written to Poole earlier on November 5, 1796, contains much of the same information, it seems plausible to accept Coleridge's statements at this point.[1]

A letter written on December 17 of that same year, while it makes no mention of amount of dosage, indicates that Coleridge's use of the drug continued at fairly regular intervals. "My Health has been very bad, and remains so," he writes John Thelwall; this, he continues, has made the "frequent use of Laudanum absolutely necessary."[2]

Thus, Coleridge's correspondence in the last two months of 1796 often mentions the poet's use of laudanum. In November he refers to extensive daily dose and by December mentions that his health has made "frequent use" a necessity. As Meyer Abrams so well observes, the significant thing is that

> in Coleridge's letters of those months, we discover more frequent references to his recourse to opium than he ever made again within the same length of time.[3]

By 1796 Coleridge was therefore no novice in the use of that drug which he was later to call the "milk of Paradise."

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[1] Collected Letters, I, 150-51. Note that November 5 is the same date as that of the letter to Cottle quoted on page five of this thesis.

[2] Collected Letters, I, 163.

[3] Abrams, p. 29.

Besides Coleridge's correspondence, there are several other sources which more indirectly indicate Coleridge's use of the powerful drug during these early years. A notebook entry dated by Kathleen Coburn as belonging to late 1796 or early 1797 mentions a "distempered dream" in which "things & forms in themselves common & harmless inflict a terror of anguish,"[1] a dream sensation often associated with narcotics. Notebook entry #273 of the year 1796 follows soon after. It is fragmentary, incoherent, dreamlike; hence M. H. Abrams suggests that these lines are a transcript of opium dream images:

> a dusky light--a purple flash
> crystalline splendor--light blue--
> Green lightnings.--
> in that eternal and delirious misery--
> wrathfires--
> inward desolations--
> and horror of great darkness
> great things that on the ocean
> counterfeit infinity--[2]

Indeed, the poem "Ode on the Departing Year" contains a vision which occurred to the poet in a "distemper's midnight anguish," a vision in which

> Cold sweat drops gather on my limbs;
> My ears throb hot; my eye balls start;
> My brain with horrid tumult swims;
> Wild is the tempest of my heart;
> And my thick and struggling breath
> Imitates the toil of death![3]
> (Stanza VI)

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[1]Kathleen Coburn, ed., The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, (New York, 1957), Entry 205. (Hereafter referred to as Notebooks.)

[2]Notebooks, Entry 273.

[3]James Dykes Campbell, ed., The Poetic Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (London, 1909)

Here, again, Abrams suggests that the vividness of the description is derived from Coleridge's narcotic-inspired dreams. This would seem to be purely speculative, however; the experience described could be merely a description of a vivid nightmare which need have no foundation in opium. One need not be addicted to laudanum or even under its temporary spell to experience the perspiration, headache, rapid heart beat, and shortness of breath of a vivid nightmare. Nevertheless, there are other definite indications that Coleridge was frequently using opium by this date, and the vividness of Stanza VI of the "Ode to the Departing Year" may very possibly be derived from a narcotic-inspired nightmare.

In an October 14 letter of the next year (1797) Coleridge mentions the completion of "Osorio," [1] a play which was rejected at the time of its composition but was later produced with some success in 1813 under the title "Remorse." "Osorio" is, of course, one of the weaker works to come from Coleridge's pen; it is not within the purpose of this paper to discuss it in any detail. A few lines from the play are, however, relevant here.

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[1] Collected Letters, I, 352.

The Moorish woman Alhadra speaks:

> Oh! would to Alla!
> The raven or the sea-mew were appointed
> To bring me food!--or rather that my soul
> Might draw in life from the universal air!
> It were a lot divine in some small skiff
> Along some ocean's boundless solitude
> To float for ever with a careless course,
> And think myself the only being alive![1]

"To float forever" is a phrase remarkably similar to Coleridge's expressed wish found in the same letter which mentions his completion of "Osorio." He tells John Thelwall on October 14, 1797:

> I should much wish, like the Indian
> Vishna, to float about along an
> infinite ocean cradled in the flower of
> the Lotos, & wake once in a million years
> for a few minutes--just to know that I was
> going to sleep a million years more.[2]

Indeed, Coleridge admits that he has put such a feeling "in the mouth of Alhadra my Moorish Woman."[3]

These rather strange references to a floating sensation are more significant than one might think, for they speak of a sensation which is often associated with opium indulgence. As Doctor Lawrence Kolb observes,

> A pleasurable sensation of floating away
> seems to be fairly common during the early
> period. . .of indulgence and addiction.[4]

In these references of late 1797 Coleridge thus indicates

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[1]Act V, Scene 1 of "Osorio"; Act IV, Scene 3 of "Remorse."

[2]Collected Letters, I, 350. [3]Ibid.

[4]Lawrence Kolb, "Pleasure and Deterioration from Narcotic Addiction," Journal of Mental Hygiene, IX (October, 1925), 706.

that his use of laudanum in December 1796 had evidently continued into the ensuing year.

To the problem of dating Coleridge's actual addiction to opium, many minds have turned. His contemporary Thomas De Quincey felt, as did Dorothy Wordsworth,[1] that the habit became confirmed during Coleridge's trip to Malta in 1804. In his Literary Reminiscences De Quincey calls the trip to Malta an "unfortunate chapter of (Coleridge's) life: for being necessarily thrown a good deal upon his own resources in the narrow society of a garrison, he there confirmed and cherished, if he did not there form, his habit of taking opium. . . ."[2] James C. Shairp agrees.[3] But certainly all these have placed the date several years too late. Those who have gone more directly to the sources have placed Coleridge's addiction at an earlier date.

For example, Meyer Abrams insists that Coleridge "certainly became addicted in 1796."[4] Elisabeth Schneider comments: "[Abrams' contention] seems likely, but I do not believe we can be at all sure."[5] Her own conclusion is

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[1]See John B. Beer, Coleridge the Visionary (London, 1959), p. 42.

[2]Thomas De Quincey, Literary Reminiscences (Boston, 1873), p. 209.

[3]J. C. Shairp, Studies in Poetry and Philosophy (Cambridge, 1878), p.128.

[4]Abrams, p. 25.

[5]Schneider, p. 317.

that "the habit, at any rate, was permanently fixed by 1801, and perhaps much earlier."[1] Kathleen Coburn, editor of Coleridge's notebooks, suggests that the "serious onset of the opium habit [came about] in the summer and autumn of 1800."[2] Earl L. Griggs, editor of Coleridge's letters, states: "It seems that his habitual use of drugs did not begin until. . .1800."[3] Unfortunately, neither Coburn nor Griggs supports his opinion, except for assuming that the extensive illnesses of 1800 would provide an excellent opportunity for habitual indulgence.

To be sure, Coleridge's own letters of later years are of little help in clarifying the problem. In a letter to Lord Byron dated April 10, 1816, Coleridge comments extensively on what he refers to as his "15 years habit";[4] this would place the date sometime around 1801.[5] A letter to Joseph Green bearing the postmark of March 29, 1832, points out that Coleridge

> had a sad trial of intestinal fever and restlessness [a few days ago] ; but thro' God's mercy, without any craving for the

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[1]Schneider, p. 62. [2]Notebooks, Coburn's note to entry 834.

[3]Collected Letters, II, 731.

[4]Unpublished Letters, II, 163.

[5]Notebook entry 990, though fragmentary, is noteworthy here. It would seem to be a memorandum for the day:

> Laudanum, Friday, Septem. 18, 1801 / Poem, dream from Dor.

> poison which for more than 30 years has been the great debasement, and misery of my existence.[1]

Here his habit is one of "more than 30 years," a phrase which could put the date of his addiction any time before 1802. It would seem hardly fair to try to equate these references with any exact date for addiction. They are, it must be remembered, products of a much later time. Moreover, the reference in the letter to Byron is merely a three-word phrase which, in its rather casual insertion, seems hardly to be seized upon as an excuse to subtract fifteen years from 1816 and come up with the year 1801! Coleridge was seldom that meticulous a man. The reference to a habit of "more than 30 years" can, of course, be criticized for the same reason. It, however, is inconclusive anyway, for such a phrase could ascribe the date of Coleridge's addiction to any reasonable time before 1802.

Thus, it would seem that Coleridge's early letters form a more reliable basis for dating the poet's addiction to laudanum at an earlier date than has generally been supposed. As has been discussed earlier, from these it is evident that:

> (1) Coleridge had tried opium as early as 1791 and possibly before.
>
> (2) In March of 1796 he was using opium more than occasionally: "I have been obliged to take Laudanum almost every night."

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[1] Unpublished Letters, II, 441.

> (3) In November, 1796, he was taking laudanum every four or five hours for a blister under his right ear.
>
> (4) In December of 1796 he wrote of "the frequent use of Laudanum" being "almost necessary."

It seems hardly plausible that after such frequent use of laudanum, no matter what its particular strength, Coleridge would be able to use the drug only occasionally in the years 1797-1800; it is not in the nature of drug addiction for a moderate or occasional use of opium to continue for very long. Nor is it plausible to think that Coleridge altogether stopped taking the drug during these years since the pain to which opium gave relief continued during the period. Thus, from the early letters and the usual pattern of drug addiction, it would seem that by late 1796 or early 1797 Samuel Taylor Coleridge was already using laudanum habitually.

Hartley Coleridge always insisted that his father had started taking opium when it had been prescribed as a relief (or cure) for a rheumatic condition. In the son's biographical supplement to Biographia Literaria, he emphasizes:

> My Father sought. . .from opium. . .the mere absence of pain; (he hoped) that the power of the medicine might keep down the agitations of his nervous system.[1]

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[1]As quoted by Arthur Symons, The Romantic Movement in English Poetry (New York, 1909), p.130.

Doctor James Gillman, in his 1838 biography of Coleridge, also stressed the fact that "Coleridge began the use of opium from bodily pain and for the same reason, continued it."[1] In April, 1826, Coleridge himself insisted that he "had been ignorantly deluded (into the habit) by the seeming magic effects of opium in the sudden removal of a rheumatic affection. . . ."[2]

One is tempted, however, to be rather sceptical of such statements. Hartley Coleridge, Dr. Gillman, and Coleridge himself had, of course, much reason for an apologetic attitude toward the subject. Hartley was writing about his father; Dr. Gillman, about his "truly great" and "ever-loving friend"[3]; Coleridge, about a habit which by 1826 he no doubt wanted to rationalize. Moreover, certain of Coleridge's contemporaries seriously doubted such protestations. Although Thomas De Quincey insists that he does not blame Coleridge for it,[4] he suggests that Coleridge "first began the use of opium, not as a relief from any bodily pains or nervous irritations, but as a source of luxurious sensations."[5]

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[1]As quoted by Edward T. Mason, ed., Personal Traits of British Authors (New York, 1885), II, 98.

[2]As quoted by H. D. Trail, Coleridge (London, 1898), p.21

[3]Phrases taken from the memorial table erected at Highgate New Church by James and Ann Gillman; as quoted in The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (New York, 1860), p.21.

[4]De Quincey, Confessions, p.21.

[5]De Quincey, Reminiscences, p.20.

Another contemporary, Robert Southey, wrote Joseph Cottle that "his own observation and that of all with whom (Coleridge) has lived," indicated that "inclination and indulgence are the motives" for Coleridge's drug habit. Southey's words express his horror and disappointment:

> You may imagine with what feelings I have read your correspondence with Coleridge. Shocking as his letters are perhaps the most mournful thing which they discover is that while acknowledging the guilt of the habit, he imputes it still to morbid bodily causes, whereas after every possible allowance is made for these, every person who has witnessed his habits, knows that for the greater--infinitely the greater part--inclination and indulgence are the motives.[1]

In spite of these comments, there seem to be several important reasons for believing Coleridge's own contention that he had been "ignorantly deluded" into the habit by the analgesic properties of the drug.

First of all, the medical knowledge of Coleridge's day seems to indicate that it could plausibly have been the medicinal properties of opium which first induced Coleridge's indulgence and perhaps helped to establish the habit inadvertently. Elisabeth Schneider summarizes:

> [Opium was considered] an anodyne powerful beyond all others during ages when medicine could rarely hope to do more than ease pain.

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[1]As quoted in a note by Earl L. Griggs, Collected Letters, III, 479-80.

> There seems to have been only the dimmest knowledge in Coleridge's day, even among medical writers, of the dangers of addiction. Opium was believed to be a medicine; it was not merely an anodyne but a cure for. . . perhaps three-fourths of the diseases to which man is subject.[1]

Walter R. Bett, in his Infirmities of Genius, comments that "it was the fashion of those years to use [opium] for a host of minor indispositions which we today would treat with aspirin." Moreover, he emphasizes the availability of the drug. It was, he points out, "freely sold anywhere to all who wished to buy it."[2]

Professor John Livingston Lowes further observes that Coleridge and all physicians of the time were well acquainted with Erasmus Darwin's Zoonomia, a book which considers opium a remedy for almost everything.[3] And Professor Schneider makes the significant comment that

> Samuel Crumpe, who wrote a book on opium in 1793, described its use for various ailments including several that figure prominently in Coleridge's letters--gout, rheumatism, and dysentery.[4]

Coleridge's contemporary Thomas De Quincey is again an important source of information concerning the present problem. In his original preface to the Confessions of an English Opium-Eater De Quincey ranks opium along with

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[1]Schneider, p. 55.

[2]Walter R. Bett, The Infirmities of Genius (New York, 1952), p. 91.

[3]John Livingston Lowes, The Road to Xanadu (Cambridge, 1930), p. 473.

[4]Schneider, p. 55.

"hemlock, henbane, and chloroform" as "amongst the most potent of adnodynes."[1] Moreover, he insists:

> Opium beyond all other agents made known to man, is the mightiest for its command, and for the extent of its command, over pain. . .so much mightier than any other, that I should think, in a Pagan land. . .opium would have had altars and priests consecrated to its benign and tutelary powers.[2]

Hence, early in the Confessions, De Quincey points out that "simply as an anodyne it was, under the mere coercion of pain the severest, that I first resorted to opium. . . .[3] He further contends that "precisely that same torment it

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[1]De Quincey, Confessions, vii.

[2]Ibid., viii.

[3]Ibid., p. 13. De Quincey's account of his first acquaintance with opium reads as follows:

> Being suddenly seized with toothache, . . .I jumped out of bed, plunged my head into a basin of cold water, and with hair thus wetted went to sleep. The next morning as I need hardly say, I awoke with excruciating rheumatic pains of the head and face, from which I had hardly any respite for about twenty days. On the twenty-first day. . .I went out into the streets; rather to run away, if possible, from my torments, than with any distinct purpose of relief. By accident, I met a college acquaintance, who recommended opium. Opium! dread agent of unimaginable pleasure and pain! I had heard of it as I had heard of manna or of ambrosia, but no further.

Confessions, p. 177.

is, or some variety of that torment, which drives most people to make acquaintance with that same insidious remedy."[1] It is therefore strange that, in Literary Reminiscences, De Quincey insists that Coleridge "first began the use of opium, not as a relief from any bodily pains or nervous irritation--for his constitution was strong and excellent--but as a source of luxurious sensations."[2] Coleridge's constitution was hardly "strong and excellent," nor does the rest of De Quincey's statement seem much more credible. The Opium-Eater's opinion of Coleridge's motive is probably best interpreted as a rebuff of one who had on several occasions been rather rude to De Quincey; it seems to contradict De Quincey's general opinions as found elsewhere in his writings and a specific opinion stated early in the Confessions:

> Coleridge, therefore, and myself, as regards our baptismal initiation into the use of that mighty drug, occupy the very same position. We are embarked in the self-same boat.[3]

Modern medical opinion agrees with Coleridge's contemporaries in contending that the analgesic qualities of the drug are those which are most significant. Doctor Louis S. Goodman, in his standard medical text The

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[1]De Quincey, Confessions, p. 13.

[2]De Quincey, Reminiscences, p. 209.

[3]De Quincey, Confessions, p. 16.

Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics, points out that "The relief of pain. . .is the outstanding effect of the drug."[1] Opium "exerts in man a narcotic action manifested by analgesia and sleep."[2] Milton Silverman devotes an entire book (Magic in a Bottle)[3] to the history of opium's use as a pain killer. It is this analgesic effect which Doctor Charles E. Terry, in his monumental work The Opium Problem[4], considers the reason for most addicts' first indulgence.[5]

Samuel Taylor Coleridge seems to be no exception to this pattern. In the early letters of 1791-97 quoted previously, it is evident that, in those still casual references, Coleridge's early use of opium was closely allied with his state of health. In the 1791 letter to his brother, opium is proposed as a relief from "a disagreeable tearing pain in my head when I move."[6] The letters of November 1796 mention the almost daily use of opium for "a Blister under my right ear."[7] And the letter

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[1]Goodman and Gilman, p. 221.

[2]Ibid., p. 220. [3] New York, 1941.

[4]An anthology of most of the important works on opium compiled for The Committee on Drug Addiction in collaboration with The Bureau of Social Hygiene.

[5]Terry and Pellens, p. 135. [6]Collected Letters, I, 17.

[7]Letters to Joseph Cottle, Unpublished Letters, I, 59; and to Thomas Poole, Collected Letters, I, 17.

of December 17, 1796 mentions that "my Health has been very bad, and remains so--"; this has "made the frequent use of Laudanum absolutely necessary."[1]

In letters of later years Coleridge always insisted that he had been "seduced into the accursed Habit ignorantly" by the analgesic property of laudanum.[2] In an 1814 letter to Cottle, Coleridge writes of his first acquaintance with the drug:

> I had been almost bed-ridden for many months with swellings in my knees--in a medical Journal I unhappily met with an account of a cure performed in a similar case. . .by rubbing in of Laudanum, at the same time taking a given dose internally. It acted like a charm, like a miracle![3]

Coleridge tells Josiah Wade on June 26 of that same year that his friend should pray for him, "a poor miserable wretch who for many years has been attempting to beat off pain by a constant recurrence to the vice that reproduces it. . . ."[4] In a letter of July, 1815, to a Dr. Sainsbury, Coleridge points out that his "Complaints in general were antecedent to my unfortunate but, God knows! most innocent resort to the Palliative [opium]."[5] A letter to Rest Fenner written sometime in September, 1816, repeats the same contention

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[1]Collected Letters, I, 163.

[2]To Joseph Cottle dated April 26, 1814. Collected Letters, III, 476.

[3]Ibid., 477. [4]Collected Letters, III, 511.

[5]Collected Letters, IV, 578.

that he has been, because of pain, "unwittingly seduced into the dread necessity of taking narcotic and anti-spasmodic drugs."[1]

These later letters reveal, admittedly, much more of an apologetic tone than do the letters of 1791-96. Probably this is due to Coleridge's increasing sense of guilt concerning his habit, a problem which will be further discussed in Chapter III of this paper. Be that as it may, there is in these later letters more of the Romantic's lament and more of an attempt at self-justification than is found in any of the early letters. Hence the details of the letters of later years may very well be a product of a mind which sought to justify a habit which Coleridge by that time knew was "accursed." But these considerations do not, it would seem, detract from the validity of the basic fact attested to by these and, more importantly, by the letters of 1791-96: Coleridge seems to have first taken opium as a relief from rheumatic pain.

To contend, however, that the medicinal properties of opium account for Coleridge's first indulgence is not to say that his subsequent addiction was, either partially or entirely, motivated by such considerations. Coleridge's later letters would have us make such an assumption, but to do so would be to disregard evidence which indicates that Coleridge derived certain pleasure from the drug, even early in his career.

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[1] Collected Letters, IV, 674.

Indeed, E. L. Griggs suggests that the earlier mentioned letter of March 12, 1796, indicates that Coleridge was at that early date also using opium to relieve mental distress.[1] The poet writes the Reverend John Edwards:

> Since I last wrote you, I have been tottering on the edge of madness--my mind overbalanced on the contra side of Happiness--the repeated blunders of the printer, the forgetfulness & blunders of my associates abroad, and at home Mrs. Coleridge dangerously ill, and expected hourly to miscarry. Such has been my situation for this last fortnight--I have been obliged to take Laudanum almost every night.[2]

The letter is certainly an important one, for in it is a rare admission on Coleridge's part that opium brought him tranquility of mind, that he found in opium what De Quincey called a "panacea for human woes."[3]

A letter of March, 1798, is even more interesting. Coleridge took opium for relief of an ulcerated tooth; this motive seems quite clear. And yet, the same letter to his brother George includes the significant sentence:

> Laudanum gave me repose, not sleep; but you, I believe, know how divine that repose is, what a spot of enchantment, a green spot of fountain and flowers and trees in the very heart of a waste of sand![4]

From this letter it is clear that Coleridge thus found in opium not only relief from bodily pain but also tranquility of mind. "Divine repose," Coleridge called it; an "abyss of

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[1]Griggs' note in Collected Letters, I, 188.

[2]Collected Letters, I, 188.

[3]Confessions, p. 179. [4]Collected Letters, I, 394-95.

divine enjoyment" said De Quincey;[1] "Les Paradis Artificiels" commented Baudelaire[2]--all experienced the particular enchantment attendant on the drug.

Modern medicine has another word for it: "euphoria." Doctor Lawrence Kolb, in his important study of the general effects of opium,[3] records various expressions that addicts have made use of in describing this sensation:

> 'It makes my troubles roll off my mind.'
> 'It is exhilarating and soothing.'
> 'You do not care for anything and you feel happy'
> 'It causes exhilaration and a feeling of comfort.'
> 'I forgot everything and did not worry. . . .'[4]

Dr. Kolb concludes that the drug, at least in the early stages of addiction, gives "considerable sense of ease and relief from one's problems."[5] When under the influence of narcotics, he observes, many addicts "have confidence in themselves and experience a sense of ease they normally do not feel."[6]

Thomas De Quincey's version is, of course, more poetic; but it describes the same euphoric effect which

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[1] Confessions, p. 179.

[2] See Arthur Symons, trans., Baudelaire--Prose and Poetry (New York, 1926), pp. 197-223.

[3] Lawrence Kolb, "Pleasure and Deterioration from Narcotic Addiction," Journal of Mental Hygiene, IX (October, 1925), 699-724.

[4] Ibid., p. 705. [5] Ibid., p. 700.

[6] Lawrence Kolb, "Types and Characteristics of Drug Addicts," Mental Hygiene, IX (April, 1925), 303.

Kolb's subjects experienced:

> It seemed to me as if I stood at a distance aloof from the uproar of life; as if the tumult, the fever, and the strife, were suspended; [a]s if[] a respite were granted from the secret burdens of the heart; some sabbath of repose; some resting from human labours.[1]

As Dr. Lewis S. Goodman points out, the use of opium often "provides an escape mechanism from reality, a way of release from the failures and disappointments of everyday life. . . .[2] He adds the significant observation that "the euphoria experienced at first soon disappears unless the dose is continuously elevated."[3]

What, then, does all this have to do with Samuel Taylor Coleridge? Elisabeth Schneider comes very close to pointing out the relevancy of it all in her passing remark that

> Coleridge was clearly one of those persons who experience a marked euphoria from opiates.[4]

Coleridge's own comments indicate that he was, indeed, just such a person, for he insists on more than one occasion that he "can not bear any thing gloomy, unless when it is quite necessary."[5] The same letter mentions the "importance

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[1]Confessions, p. 194.

[2]Goodman and Gilman, p. 242.

[3]Ibid., p. 243.

[4]Schneider, p. 318.

[5]Collected Letters, II, 888.

of tranquillity" to him.[1] A letter of December of that year concludes with a similar statement: "Warmth, warm clothing, and tranquillity of mind are things of absolute necessity with me."[2] A letter of a few days later (December 17) parallels the earlier statement: "Deep and pleasurable Tranquillity of Mind--and even warmth of Body --are absolutely necessary for me. . . ."[3] These things were important to Coleridge, and these things opium could give!

Moreover, a notebook entry dated December, 1801, indicates that Coleridge was himself aware of the relief from mental irritation that opium could bring. He writes:

> Strictly one should notice the cases in which Opium restores the patient to his powers, of breathing, for instance; & those far more numerous in which it only suspends the pain of their Suspension.[4]

Although the syntax is difficult and the antecedents even more confused, this passage seems to indicate that Coleridge considers opium as having both a restorative and an euphoric power.

With all of this in mind, it seems more than speculation to contend, then, that the euphoric effect of opium was a

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[1]Collected Letters, II, 888-89.

[2]Ibid., 897.

[3]Ibid., 901.

[4]Notebooks, entry 1076.

significant fact in the story of opium and Coleridge. It is evident that

> (1) Euphoria was early experienced by Coleridge in what he called "divine repose."
>
> (2) By his own repeated admission, the "tranquillity of mind" which opium can bring, was "almost a necessity" to him.
>
> (3) Although pain no doubt prompted Coleridge's first indulgences, the euphoric effect quite probably influenced his subsequent addiction.

Doctor Charles E. Terry suggests that the typical pattern of drug addiction could be summarized as follows:

> It seems that the majority of cases arise from the use of morphia to quiet pain but that the euphoria which develops tempts the patient to continue the use of the drug.[1]

From the evidence available, there is much reason to believe that Samuel Taylor Coleridge followed such a pattern.

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[1]Terry and Pellens, p. 137.

## CHAPTER II

## OPIUM, CREATIVITY, AND "KUBLA KHAN"

Since the time of Thomas De Quincey, it has generally been supposed that one of the primary effects of opium is its power to intensify sensations. Indeed, for De Quincey himself, the "primary effects of opium are always, and in the highest degree, to excite and stimulate the system."[1] Because of this, he writes in his Confessions, Saturday night was his favorite time to indulge in the drug; after taking laudanum on that evening, he found his place in the gallery of the opera house. Through the medium of opium he was "able to construct out of the raw material of organic sound an elaborate intellectual pleasure."[2] Moreover, in such a state he found the entire experience a sensual as well as intellectual one. He was surrounded by "the music of the stage and the orchestra" and had all around him, "in the intervals of the performance, the music of the Italian language talked by Italian women. . . ."[3] Opium has, he insists, "often led me into markets and theatres." He admits that

> markets and theatres are not the appropriate haunts of the opium-eater when in the divinest state incident to his enjoyment. In that state, crowds become an oppression to him; music, even, too sensual and gross.[4]

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[1] Confessions, p. 186.

[2] Ibid., p. 189.

[3] Ibid., pp. 189-90.

[4] Ibid., pp. 192-93.

Thus, De Quincey argues that opium intensifies the senses--and it has generally been assumed that his was a valid observation.

Elisabeth Schneider, who has done extensive research on the subject, insists that opium's alleged effect of heightening and intensifying the senses is merely part of the folklore surrounding the drug. Intensification of the senses, she bluntly asserts, "it quite definitely does not do." "If any thing," she continues, "the effect is the reverse."[1] Rather, the "prime property of the drug is its narcosis of the sense of pain." Hence, "I think we are bound to give up any notion that the drug reverses itself, acting as a sort of anti-narcotic on one or two senses while it narcotizes the others."[2] Her conclusion is, therefore, that

> The senses, it appears, are actually either unaffected or dulled--more often the latter--by opiates.[3]

The available medical references seem to neither specifically affirm nor definitely deny Miss Schneider's observations, primarily because of the fact that "the effects of analgesics of the opiate group on sensations other than pain have received relatively little attention. . . ."[4]

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[1]Schneider, p. 41.

[2]Ibid., p. 42.

[3]Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[4]Abraham Wikler, Helen Goodell, and Harold Wolff, "The Effects of Analgesic Agents on Sensations Other Than Pain," Journal of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics, LXXXIII (1945), 294.

Still, these sources indicate that Schneider's contention is more than idle speculation. In the first place, they agree that opium's primary effect is the narcosis of pain. This fact is axiomatic in Doctor Louis S. Goodman's standard medical text The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics, in Doctor Charles Terry's The Opium Problem,[1] and in such articles as Doctor M. H. Seever's "Study of the Analgesia. . .Produced by Morphine. . .in the Normal Human Subject,"[2] and Doctor Lawrence Kolb's "Types and Characteristics of Drug Addicts."[3] Secondly, the lack of specific material on the effects of opiates on sensations other than pain may well stem from the general assumption that a narcotic drug does not, as Schneider says, "reverse itself" on other sensations. Be that as it may, the most recent source (1945) available on this topic--indeed, the only source listed in even the specialized bibliographies available--would seem to confirm Schneider's position. Doctor Abraham Wikler's research in this field indicates that opiates do not alter "the threshold for perception of touch, vibration, hearing and smell";[4] whereas "in contrast to the lack of effect on the nonpainful sensations, there is shown the pain threshold raising effect" of

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[1]See above, pp. 19-20.

[2]"A Study of the Analgesia Subjective Depression, and Euphoria Produced by Morphine, Heroine, Dilaudid, and Codeine in the Normal Human Subject," Journal of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics, LVI (1936), 166-87.

[3]Mental Hygiene, IX (April, 1925), 300-313.

[4]Wikler, p. 298.

opiates.[1] That is, in Wilkler's experiments, opium dulled pain but had very little effect on the other sensations.

How, then, can De Quincey's insistence on the intensifying power of opium be explained? Sir George Douglas, in his introduction to the Everyman's edition of the Confessions, makes a remark which is suggestive, if not authoritative:

> De Quincey's abnormal sensitiveness to impressions caused him to exaggerate the strength of the agents by which those impressions were produced; for example, the speed of the Mail Coach, in the essay devoted to that subject.[2]

Moreover, it would seem plausible to suggest that the euphoric effect of opium which was discussed in Chapter I is also relevant to the present problem. Under the sense of well being which opium can induce, one's native sensitivity is unencumbered by the normal problems and anxieties of life. Hence, it seems that, as opium relieved De Quincey of the miseries of his everyday life, his extraordinary sensitivity to outward impressions was given free rein. Opium did not "intensify"; it merely released the natural endowments of an extraordinarily sensitive man. As might be expected, the point is not irrelevant in this investigation of the story of opium and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Besides his insistence on the intensifying properties of what he called "the celestial drug," De Quincey also mentioned the "creative state of the eye"[3] under the influence of that drug. Samuel Coleridge spoke of the same effect in

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[1]Wikler, p. 296.

[2]Confessions, p. xii.

[3]Ibid., p. 233.

lines composed late in the evening of August 28, 1800. They first appear in a notebook entry of that date, and were later published in an altered version as "Apolgia Pro Vita Sua." As Coleridge looked out of his window at a chimney "ejaculating its inverted cone of smoke," he wrote:

> The poet's eye in his tipsy hour
> Hath a magnifying power
> Or rather emancipates his eyes
> Of the accidents of size.
> In unctuous cones of kindling Coal
> Or smoke from his Pipe's bole,
> His eye can see
> Phantoms of sublimity.[1]

These original lines seem another statement of opium's alleged effect on the poet's sensation: the "magnifying power" comes at the poet's "tipsy" (later "genial") hour, an hour brought on, no doubt, with the aid of an "anodyne." Here again opium seems to have a "creative" effect; here again such an effect would seem to be more the result of an imagination given free rein than any more direct influence of the drug. Coleridge's eyes are, in his own words, "emancipated." Sir George Douglas remarks about De Quincey, "Opium put nothing of fancy or imagination into the Opium-Eater, but only brought out what was already there."[2] What was true of his contemporary, seems also to be true of Coleridge.

Thus far, it has been suggested that any creative properties which opium may possess are, rather than a direct cause-effect relationship, or a more indirect nature. It is the purpose of these next pages to investigate various areas

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[1] Notebooks, entry 791.

[2] Confessions, p. xii.

in which such an indirect influence can be found at work.

The concept of the unconscious or subconscious mind is, of course, generally considered a rather modern idea introduced to the world through the writings of Sigmund Freud. Yet, several of the Romantics were well aware of the concept. As Professor James V. Baker points out in his brilliant exegesis of Coleridge's theory of the imagination, the term "unconscious" was in 1818 introduced to English criticism by Coleridge.[1] "The unconscious," said Coleridge, "is the genius in the man of genius."[2] While he did not use the term, De Quincey was also aware that there was some realm other than the active, conscious mind. Again in the Confessions, he comments:

> I feel assured that there is no such thing as ultimate forgetting; traces once impressed upon the memory are indestructible; a thousand accidents may and will interpose a veil between our present consciousness and the secret inscriptions of the mind. . . whether veiled or unveiled, the inscriptions remain forever.[3]

A passage from Thomas Carlyle's "Essay on Characteristics" contains a like statement: "Underneath the region of argument and conscious discourse lies the region of meditation." It is "here in its quiet mysterious depths" that "what vital force is in us" dwells; "here, if aught is to be created and not merely manufactured and communicated, must the work go on," he concludes.[4] The Romantics, perhaps because they were

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[1]James V. Baker, The Sacred River (Louisiana State University Press, 1957), p. 187.

[2]Quoted by Baker, p. xi. [3]Confessions, p. 234.

[4]Thomas Carlyle, Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (Boston, 1869), II. 376.

vaguely aware of the depths from which they drew[1] and because they were by nature introspective, speculated on the existence of the unconscious mind.

Walter A. Wells, in A Doctor's Life of John Keats, and James V. Baker, in The Sacred River, suggest that the unconscious mind is importantly related to the problem of creativity. Therefore, such a concept is highly relevant to the present discussion. Wells points out that "the mind is active and alert in the subconscious state" and that

> There is much evidence indeed that the ideas from dreams may present themselves in a logical and consistent form, proving the unconscious to be capable of constructive creative thought.[2]

Wells defines the unconscious or subconscious as "an unfathomable region of the mind, invested with a dynamic quality, and the seat and source of beauty, goodness, truth, and creative thought." "Now and then," he continues, "a little of its precious content does escape into the conscious mind." When this happens, it takes place "by means of what we call intuitive experience--and occasionally, by dreams or by visions."[3]

Professor Baker agrees that the unconscious, "the subterranean fountains of the sacred river," is a "deep mine" of thoughts, images, and symbols.[4] Morover, he argues that

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[1]See Baker, p. 187.

[2]Walter A. Wells, A Doctor's Life of John Keats (New York, 1959) p. 234.

[3]Ibid., p. 241.

[4]Baker, pp. xiv and 211.

Coleridge's "organic theory of creative imagination. . . carries within it a certain implication." Such a theory, Baker contends, supposed that

> the silent forces of growth and germination--the unnoticed coalescence of images in the unconscious mind--are an integral part of the process.[1]

Hence Baker contends that Coleridge's celebrated theory of the Imagination as the primary creative force includes within it the vast resources of the unconscious mind.

In an undated notebook entry, Coleridge himself points up the relevancy of all this, for he speaks expressly of opium and its relationship to the unconscious. "Trains of forgotten Thought" arise from their "living Catacombs"; opium releases thoughts from the unconscious:

> For what is Forgetfulness? Renew the state of affection of bodily Feeling, same or similar--sometimes dimly similar, and instantly the trains of forgotten Thought rise up from their living Catacombs!--Old men, & Infancy and Opium, probably by its narcotic effect on the whole seminal organization, in a large Dose, or after long use, produces the same effect on the visual, & passive memory.[2]

In another notebook entry dated by R. C. Bald as belonging to the year 1808, Coleridge speaks of the drug as "pernicious" but, nevertheless, as "capable of conceiving and bringing forth the deepest feelings of Thoughts hidden before."[3]

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[1]Baker, p. 151.

[2]From Notebook XVI as quoted by Schneider, p. 69.

[3]See R. C. Bald, "Coleridge and the Ancient Mariner," Nineteenth Century Studies (Ithaca, 1940), p. 36.

It is noteworthy that Coleridge speaks in the former entry of "Trains" of forgotten thought, that is, long associations of previous impressions. Coleridge was, of course, early attracted to the philosophy of David Hartley, a philosophy which proposed that the law of association governed the thought processes. As Professor Baker observes, "It was a case of love at first sight, an infatuation with Hartley."[1] The young poet was particularly attracted by Hartley's suggestion that association was at work in reverie and dreams, for he had always been interested in the phenomenon of dreams. "I have long wished to devote an entire work to the subject of dreams, visions, ghosts, and witchcraft," he once wrote.[2] Yet, in later years Coleridge rejected what he then considered the rather "blind mechanism" of Hartleian association.[3] As Professor Baker observes:

> The root of Coleridge's objection to Hartley is that in his system the mind is largely passive, subjected to impressions and the single law of association, operating automatically without intervention of the will.[4]

It was his reading of the philosophy of Kant which convinced Coleridge that Hartley's view of the mind was too mechanistic, for he quickly perceived that in Kant's philosophy the mind is an active, shaping force.[5]

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[1]Baker, p. 16.

[2]See Kathleen Coburn, ed., Inquiring Spirit (London, 1951), p. 52.

[3]See Chapter VII of Biographia Literaria for Coleridge's attack on the Hartleian philosophy.

[4]Baker, p. 106.

[5]Ibid., p. 29.

Thus, in Coleridge's discussion of the Fancy and the Imagination in Biographia Literaria, he associates the laws of association with the lesser power, Fancy. Professor Baker explicates: "Fancy receives its materials, like Memory, from the laws of association."[1] This is Professor Baker's main criticism of Coleridge's theory of the creative imagination, for Baker contends that association is also part of the imaginative, creative process. "Coleridge failed to see, although he did partly see, how important that despised power [Hartleian association] really is in works of the creative imagination."[2] None the less, at the time of the composition of "Kubla Khan," Coleridge espoused the cause of Hartleian association and, as has been previously mentioned, himself indicated that opium could set the rapid associations in motion.

According to Thomas De Quincey, "The main phenomenon by which opium expressed itself permanently, and the sole phenomenon that was communicable, lay in the dreams and the dream scenery which followed the opium excesses."[3] At night, he writes, a "theatre seemed suddenly opened and lighted up within my brain"; such nightly spectacles were "of more than earthly splendour."[4] Often, he comments, "I have been transported into Asiatic scenery."[5] Moreover, in the early stages

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[1]Baker, p. 152.

[2]Ibid., p. 255.

[3]Confessions, p. 211.

[4]Ibid., p. 233.

[5]Ibid., p. 240.

of his addiction, "the splendours of my dreams were indeed chiefly architectural; and I beheld such pomp of cities and palaces as never yet was beheld by the waking eye, unless in the clouds."[1] Such references are too reminiscent of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" to be lightly dismissed. The magnificence of Kubla's vast "pleasure-dome" is, indeed, "of more than earthly splendor"; the setting is "Asiatic"; the picture is architectural with its "dome," "walls," and "towers." Indeed, the world of Kubla Khan is very like the artificial paradise which is associated with what De Quincey called the "celestial drug"[2] and Coleridge, the "milk of Paradise."

Yet, if any of Coleridge's poems comes close to his idea of poetry giving "most pleasure when only generally and not perfectly understood,"[3] it is his own "Kubla Khan." John B. Beer, in his Coleridge the Visionary, points out that "Kubla Khan" is

> surrounded by mystery, and an important element in the mystery is Coleridge's own reticence on the subject. He never referred to it in any of his letters or published works, except on the occasion when he wrote a preface for it on its first publication in 1816.[4]

The content of the preface is almost too well known for

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[1]Confessions, p. 38. [2]Ibid., p. 178.

[3]See Coburn, Inquiring Spirit, p. 156.

[4]Beer, p. 197. The research for this thesis has, insofar as the sources were available, confirmed Beer's general observation: not one reference was found in the four volumes of Coleridge's Collected Letters, and the only published reference seems to be that of the preface to the 1816 edition of the poem.

reiteration. After taking an "anodyne" for a "slight indisposition," the author fell asleep while reading a passage in Purchas's Pilgrimage:

> The author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation, or consciousness of effort. On awaking he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink, and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved.[1]

Another independent account of the writing of the poem is now known: "The Crewe Manuscript." E. L. Griggs points out that the following note was added to an autographed copy of the poem now in the possession of Lady Crewe:

> This fragment with a good deal more, not recoverable, composed, in a sort of Reverie brought on by two grains of Opium, taken to check a dysentery, at a Farm House between Porlock & Linton, a quarter of a mile from Culbone Church, in the fall of the year, 1797. [2]

This latter account leaves little doubt, if there ever was any, that the "anodyne" mentioned was opium; moreover, it helps to clarify the date of composition of a poem which was actually published some nineteen years later.[3]

For Elisabeth Schneider, the Crewe holograph is

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[1]See The Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Prose and Verse (Philadelphia, 1845), I, 54.

[2]See Collected Letters, I, 349.

[3]Beer, p. 201, comments: "E. K. Chambers, who examined the date of 'Kubla Khan' more thoroughly and over a longer period of time than anyone else, finally came to favour a date early in October, 1797."

exceedingly important in what it does not say. She points out that

> one very notable difference. . .has received less attention than it deserves. The "profound sleep" with its dream and the subsequent recording of it purely from memory are not to be found in the Crewe autograph.[1]

As far as she is concerned, Schneider doubts "almost everything in Coleridge's account except perhaps Porlock."[2] She bases much of her argument on what she calls a "literal interpretation" of "Kubla Khan." As the poem was published, it "clearly consists of two parts." The first is a description of Kubla's Paradise garden; and the second is "an explanation of why the poet could not after all finish what he had begun, or, to speak within the framework of the dream, why he could not re-create the vision he had seen." Hence, she suggests that

> The whole reads like a fragment with a postscript added at some later time when it has become obvious to the poet that he cannot finish the piece.[3]

In Schneider's opinion, the 1816 preface is therefore a rationalization by one who, for some reason or other, would not or could not finish the poem. It could, she insists, "bear the blame and serve as a natural shield against criticism."[4]

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[1]Schneider, p. 26.

[2]Ibid., p. 17.

[3]Ibid., p. 247.

[4]Ibid., p. 27.

Miss Schneider's attempt to debunk is, indeed, an ingenious one; but her thesis seems no more convincing than John Livingston Lowes' almost classic interpretation. It is his opinion that "Kubla Khan" emerged from Coleridge's "unconscious memory"[1] while under the influence of opium. The dream was "plainly an opium dream,"[2] Lowes contends, even though "an opium dream, like any other dream, draws for its elements upon past experience."[3] At any rate, in the "dream-wrought fabric"[4] of the poem, "the sleeping images flocked up. . .from the deeps"[5] and "followed one another in that world of dreams."[6] Indeed, "nobody in his waking sense could have fabricated those amazing eighteen (final) lines," Lowes concludes.[7] It is thus Lowes' contention that recourse to opium released the images stored in what he calls the "subliminal reservoir"[8] of Coleridge's mind, a mind "thronged with images which had flashed on the inner eye from the pages of innumerable books."[9]

A more recent book, The Sacred River (1957), upholds Lowes' thesis. James V. Baker points out that

> Coleridge's own images have the quality of recent immersion, as though, while perfectly adapted to the purpose of the poem, they are still freshly wet and iridescent with the dream-life of the mind, and not quite sure what they are doing at the surface level.[10]

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[1]Lowes, p. 365. [2]Ibid., p. 417. [3]Ibid., p. 418.
[4]Ibid., p. 93. [5]Ibid., p. 343. [6]Ibid., p. 418.
[7]Ibid., p. 363. [8]Ibid., p. 343. [9]Ibid.
[10]Baker, p. 197.

It is "Kubla Khan" particularly whose "fresh" images seem to have "welled up like a cold spring from inward depths," Baker observes.[1] Thus it is the images themselves which Baker feels give credibility to Coleridge's own account of the poem and Lowes' subsequent interpretation; they are marked with the characteristics of the subconscious mind, and released by the effect of an "anodyne."

But is all this to say that "Kubla Khan" was literally and directly a product of opium's alleged creative powers? Coleridge's 1816 preface to the poem has usually been considered a testimony to such a fact. Moreover, Thomas De Quincey's famous eulogy to opium has been similarly interpreted:

> O just, subtle, and all-conquering opium!. . . thou buildest upon the bosom of darkness, out of the fantastic imagery of the brain cities and temples, beyond the art of Phidias and Praxiteles . . . Thou only givest these gifts to man; and thou hast the keys of Paradise, O just, subtle, and mighty opium![2]

A more searching perusal of these passages is necessary, however; for it would seem that, when carefully read, such references indicate a less direct influence than is generally supposed. Coleridge had, "from the effect" of an "anodyne," fallen asleep, a sleep in which a "Vision in a Dream" occurred. Thus, the passage states that "Kubla Khan" was composed in a sleep; opium did not "create" the poem, it merely caused the sleep in which the poem was dreamed. Similarly, it should be noted that De Quincey's eulogy to the power of opium

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[1]Baker, p. 184.

[2]Confessions, p. 194.

asserts that opium builds "upon" and "out of the fantastic imagery of the brain"; it does not directly shape or create. "Kubla Khan" could, even considering the famous preface, very well be considered the product of a dream world--that is, the product of the unconscious mind as Lowes and Baker contend--rather than the product of any "new world"[1] directly fabricated by the anodyne.

If, however, opium does not of itself seem to possess the power of literal or direct creation, its influence was, nevertheless, an important one on "Kubla Khan"--and perhaps Coleridge's other poems. As has already been suggested, a flood of images gathered from vast reading and stored in the recesses of the unconscious mind were, under the influence of laudanum, released into the striking pictures and associations which found their way into that strangest of poems, Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." Moreover, it would seem that opium influenced the creativity of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in yet another way. Coleridge himself hinted at it when he spoke in "Apologia Pro Vita Sua" of the "emancipation" of his eyes. As this chapter suggested earlier, opium through its euphoric effect gave free rein to the extraordinary sensitivity of Thomas De Quincey. Furthermore, Chapter I contended that the euphoria which opium induced was a prime motive in Coleridge's addiction; and it is of prime concern at this point in the investigation of opium and creativity.

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[1]Abrams, p. 4.

Lawrence Kolb writes of a "very intelligent, highly educated" addict who said that in the earlier stages of addiction opium "caused a buoyancy of spirits, increased imagination, and temporarily enlarged brain power."[1] Moreover, Dr. Charles E. Terry observes that sometimes addicts feel themselves "stimulated under the influence of the remedy to mental work which they could not accomplish in their ordinary constant state of purposelessness."[2] And Dr. Louis S. Goodman emphasizes that when opium is given to patients with "pain, discomfort, worry, and tension," euphoria is frequently experienced.[3] This was, as has been discussed earlier, true of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. An undated notebook entry would seem to be Coleridge's most extensive statement of the euphoric state attendant on the drug:

> When in a state of pleasurable & balmy Quietness I feel my Cheek and Temple on the nicely made up Pillow. . .as I first sink on the pillow, as if Sleep had indeed a material realm, as if when I sank on my pillow, I was entering that region & realized Faery Land of Sleep--O then what visions have I had, what dreams--the Bark, the Sea, till the shapes & sounds & adventures made up of the Stuff of Sleep & Dreams, & yet my Reason at the Rudder--O what visions, . . .& I sink down the waters, thro' Seas & Seas--yet warm, yet a Spirit. . .[4]

It is this state of "pleasurable and balmy Quietness" where, if it resulted in actual sleep, the vast store of images and experiences might well be released in "visions" like "Kubla

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[1]Kolb, "Pleasure and Deterioration," p. 706.

[2]Terry and Pellens, p. 196. [3]Goodman and Gilman, p. 820.

[4]As quoted by Schneider, p. 67.

Khan." If, on the other hand, such a state did not result in withdrawal from the conscious world, it could serve as a stimulus to Coleridge's naturally-endowed, creative imagination. As Elisabeth Schneider astutely observes, this is not to say that opium gave Coleridge powers that he did not normally possess.[1] Nor is it even necessary to assume that, as De Quincey pointed out, the drug even strengthened the man in his natural bent.[2] Rather, it would seem that opium released and relaxed; Coleridge created.

Professor Baker summarizes Coleridge's discussion of the creative act as found in Biographia Literaria by observing that Coleridge felt that the act of creation called

> "the whole soul of man" into activity--the higher intuitive reason, the intellect, the imagination, the associative fancy, judgment or common sense, powers conscious and unconscious.

In short, the poet "calls on everything he has."[3] This, it would seem, opium helped Samuel Taylor Coleridge to do. Not only did it release the images and experiences from Coleridge's unconscious mind, but also, through the euphoria it produced, gave free rein to the poet's conscious use of an extraordinary, naturally-endowed Imagination. The world of Coleridge's poems seems not, as Meyer Abrams contends, a

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[1]Schneider, p. 40.

[2]"If a man whose talk is of oxen should become an opium eater, the probability is, that . . .he will dream about oxen." Confessions, p. 11.

Baker, p. 135.

"new world" directly given by the "great gift of opium,"[1] but rather the world of the unconscious mind, the world of the Imagination--and the world of Coleridge's creative genius!

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[1]Abrams, p. 4.

## CHAPTER III

## GUILT, "THE ANCIENT MARINER," AND "CHRISTABEL"

In his introduction to the Everyman's edition of Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, Sir George Douglas observes that "throughout his book, De Quincey exhibits a blindness. . .to the moral aspect of indulgence in opium."[1] Indeed, in De Quincey's original preface to the work, he dispatches considerations of ethics: "Guilt," he asserts, "I do not acknowledge. . . ."[2] And later: "Opium, or any agent of equal powers, is entitled to assume that it was revealed to man for some higher object than that it should furnish a target for moral denunciations."[3] Moreover, in the Confessions itself, De Quincey includes in his definition of perfect happiness a cottage in the woods wherein he imagines an abundance of books and a plentiful supply of laudanum. At the mention of a "bottle of opium," he hastens to add that he has "no objection to seeing a picture of that; you may paint it, if you choose." Yet, he insists, "I apprise you that no 'little' receptacle would, even in 1816, answer my purpose. . . ."[4] Hence, far from being an occasion for regret and guilt, De Quincey seems almost the braggart as he here refers to opium, the "great central sun"[5] of his life. Therefore, he expressly

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[1] Confessions, p. x.

[2] Ibid., p. 3.

[3] Ibid., p. 7.

[4] Ibid., p. 209.

[5] Ibid., p. 216.

gives

> notice to all, whether moralist or surgeons, that, whatever be their pretensions and skill in their respective lines of practice, they must not hope for any countenance from me. . . .[1]

If De Quincey's own statements are deemed credible, it would seem, then, that any guilt resulting from his opium addiction was insignificant as far as that poet is concerned.

Perhaps De Quincey was in this matter only reflecting the prevalent attitude of his day, for Elisabeth Schneider contends that "it was not until toward the mid-century [the nineteenth] that the name of 'opium-eater' came to be thought of as a stigma."[2] Hence, she insists that, "since no shame or disgrace was attached to the use of opium when 'Kubla Khan' was written, [Coleridge] could have had no hesitation on that score in speaking of it."[3] It is just possible, however, that Miss Schneider is in error on this particular assumption; and furthermore, that De Quincey is far more concerned about moral aspects of the question than his remarks would indicate.

Schneider's insistence that there was generally little stigma attached to opium-taking in Coleridge's day, is, it would seem, a statement <u>relative</u> to the situation of today. Certainly, there was far <u>less</u> disgrace attributed to opium-taking in a society where opium could be readily bought for a few cents at most apothocaries. But De Quincey's specific

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[1]<u>Confessions</u>, p. 200. [2]Schneider, p. 31.

[3]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 81.

disavowal of the "moralists" indicates that such people--and such attitudes--did indeed exist in early nineteenth century England. Furthermore, the rather grandiose and braggartly tone of his specific disavowal of guilt might well render his statements on this account more than a little suspect. Hence, the assertions in De Quincey's preface to the Confessions could very well be a justification of a habit which had aroused the indignation of those around him, or would do so when the facts were made public. For the passionate De Quincey, an assertive denial of any feelings of guilt was a sufficient rebuttal.

At any rate, Schneider's assumption that Coleridge "could have had no hesitation" in speaking of opium in the preface to "Kubla Khan" because "no shame or disgrace was attached to the use of opium when the poem was written" is rather illogical and, as this chapter attempts to suggest, probably in error. For it would seem that, whatever society thought of the habit of taking opium, Coleridge himself felt guilty about it.

As a matter of fact, the protestations of several of Coleridge's close friends tend to put them into the class labeled "moralists" by De Quincey. Joseph Cottle and Robert Southey, rather than helping Coleridge in his 1814 attempts to withdraw from the drug, criticized him for the "shocking" contents of his letters of April of that year.[1] Indeed,

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[1]See above, p. 16, and Collected Letters, III, 476-78.

as Coleridge wrote him on April 26, 1814, Cottle's berating and ill-advised letters only "poured oil in the raw and festering Wound of an old friend's Conscience. . .it is oil of Vitriol!"[1] Not long before, Cottle had first discovered Coleridge's excessive indulgence in opium and had written the poet a long letter expressing his shock, horror, and--by most evident implication--his disapproval.[2] Coleridge's reply deserves careful consideration.

He assures Cottle that his object is "to state the case just as it is." "For years the anguish of my spirit has been indescribable, the sense of my danger staring, but the conscience of my GUILT worse, far far worse than all!" He has prayed, "trembling not only before the Justice of my Maker, but even before the Mercy of my Redeemer," for he has long been "overwhelmed with the sense of my dire Infirmity." This has been the occasion of many tears and "the very bitterness of shame." The habit of taking the "dire poison" is, indeed, "ACCURSED."[3] In a letter to Cottle written later that evening Coleridge reminded him that he had "no conception of the dreadful Hell of my mind & conscience & body." To Cottle's specific admonishment, Coleridge replies:

> You bid me pray. O I do pray inwardly to be able to pray; but indeed to pray with the faith to which Blessing is promised, this is the reward of Faith,

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[1] Collected Letters, III, 476.

[2] See Unpublished Letters, II, p. 207.

[3] Collected Letters, III, 476-77.

> this is the Gift of God to the Elect. Or if to feel how infinitely worthless I am, how poor a wretch, with just free will enough to be deserving of wrath, & of my own contempt, & of none to merit a moment's peace, can make a part of a Christian's creed; so far I am a Christian--
> S.T.C.[1]

In answer to Coleridge's letters, Cottle was "afflicted to perceive that Satan is so busy with you. . . ."[2] Indeed, in the interchange of letters which followed, Cottle tried, as Coleridge wrote John J. Morgan,

> to convince me, that it has not been Opium, quoad Opium, that has injured me; but. . .the DEVIL--Yes, says he, the Devil, depend upon it has got possession of you--It is the Devil that is even now within you--"a strong man armed--that is, this said Devil--has the mastery of you; but a stronger than he will not suffer him, I hope, to keep possession--Do not deceive yourself about opium: it is the evil spirit, it is the DEVIL that is in you."

Coleridge comments to Morgan, "Now is not Jo a rare comforter to a poor fellow in dreadful low spirits? . . . poor Jo--God bless him! He is a well meaning Creature but a great Fool."[3] In this letter Coleridge thus admits to his loyal and understanding friend Morgan that it is Opium which is, in fact, his problem; and that whatever guilt he feels about it is directly a result of opium, not any rationalization of the kind proposed by Cottle.

But that he does feel a sense of guilt--indeed, a sense of sin--about his opium habit, is evident in two other extremely important letters written to Morgan. It is well to

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[1]Collected Letters, III, 478.

[2]As quoted by E. L. Griggs, Unpublished Letters, II, 107n.

[3]Unpublished Letters, II, 116.

digress for a moment about the recipient of these letters. John Morgan, his wife Mary, and her sister Charlotte, were among the most loyal, understanding, and helpful friends of Coleridge. The poet had early acquainted "Mr. Morgan. . . his Wife & her Sister. . .with the whole case" of his opium addiction. Indeed, their "ardent Friendship" had "continued to be my main comfort and my only support. . . ."[1] With them Coleridge lived during the time of the controversy with Wordsworth,[2] and to them Coleridge seems to have spoken openly and honestly. "If it be allowed to call any one on earth Saviour, Morgan & his Family have been my Saviours, Body and Soul," Coleridge wrote Wordsworth in May, 1812. Moreover, Coleridge rather caustically assures Wordsworth, "Neither from him or his family has one word ever escaped" concerning his opium habit.[3]

For all these reasons, then, it is in Coleridge's letters to Morgan that some of his most credible statements are made. In them is confirmed the fact that Coleridge long suffered from a sense of guilt, from an awareness of sin, resulting from his opium habit.

On Saturday, May 14, 1814, Coleridge wrote Morgan from the home of a Doctor Daniel, a physician who was attempting to help Coleridge break what the poet refers to as his "long

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[1]Collected Letters, III, 399.

[2]See Collected Letters, III, 296-97 and 394-99.

[3]Ibid., p. 399.

long Habit of [taking] the accursed Poison." The letter deserves lengthy quotation:

> What crime is there scarcely which has not been included in or followed from the one guilt of taking opium? Not to speak of ingratitude to my Maker for the wasted Talents; of ingratitude to so many friends who have loved me I know not why; of barbarous neglect of my family;. . .I have in this one dirty business of Laudanum an hundred times deceived, tricked, nay, actually and consciously lied. And yet all these vices are so opposite to my Nature, that but for this free-agency-annihilating Poison, I verily believe that I should have suffered myself to have been cut to pieces rather than have committed any one of them. . . . From the Sole of my foot to the Crown of my head there was not an Inch in which I was not continually in torture; for more than a fortnight no sleep ever visited my Eyelids--but the agonies of remorse were worse than all![1]

His addiction is a "crime," a "one guilt" which has led to "ingratitude" to his Maker and his friends and "neglect" of his family; it is a "dirty business" of "vices" which has resulted from the "annihilating Poison" which, through its tyranny, denies free will; from it he suffers most of all from the "agonies of remorse."

Another letter to Morgan dated the next day, May 15, 1814, again refers to his "Crime" of opium addiction, his "wicked direful practice." Because of it, he has often "wished to have been trodden and spit upon, if by any means it might be an atonement for the direful guilt." Here again he is worried about the "alienation of Mary's and Charlotte's esteem and affection," although he interprets such alienation

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[1]Unpublished Letters, II, 110-11.

of friends as "among the due punishments of my Crime." In despair he cries out, "I am nothing but evil--I can do nothing but evil!"[1] All of this is the vocabulary of one oppressed by guilt, of one who--regardless of whether or not society considered it a disgrace--felt keenly and pervasively the stigma inherent in what he considered his "ACCURSED" habit.

By 1814 Samuel Taylor Coleridge was, then, willing to admit his feelings of guilt about his opium habit. It is the contention of this paper, however, that such feelings of guilt were in fact experienced far earlier than 1814--indeed, as early as the time of "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel." At this early time, Coleridge was not yet articulate about what he later called the "soul-and-body Blight" of opium addiction; he was not willing to be. But there are many indications that such a feeling existed.

Indeed, the relative lack of references to laudanum in Coleridge's letters of 1798-1814 may in fact bear testimony to such a contention. As was shown in Chapter I,[3] Coleridge's letters of 1796 contained frequent but rather casual references to his opium-taking during the last months of that year, even though his indulgences were large enough and frequent enough to result in addiction soon after that date. Suddenly, however, opium is no longer mentioned--and precisely at the time when, as Chapter I has contended,

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[1]Unpublished Letters, II, 112-13.

[2]Collected Letters, III, 527.

[3]See above, pp.2-7 and 13-14.

Coleridge's actual addiction was a fact. Thus the very lack of primary evidence for the contention that Coleridge very early felt guilty about his opium habit, is perhaps the very best evidence for such a feeling. With addiction came guilt, with guilt came reticence.

In later years, as has been shown earlier in this chapter, Coleridge was most articulate about such feelings. Several of these references of later years seem also to indicate that the feeling of guilt, the sense of sin, was of long standing. A letter written as late as March 29, 1832, mentions "the poison which for more than 30 years has been the great debasement and misery of my existence."[1] Yet, even as early as December 3 of 1808, Coleridge wrote to John Prior Estline that "for years I had with the bitterest pangs of Self-disapprobation struggled in secret against the habit of taking narcotics."[2] Coleridge was willing to admit such things--temporarily--for he was, through the help of a Doctor Beddoes,[3] trying to break the habit. By submitting himself to the physician and admitting his trouble, he had been able to make some progress:

> . . .such has been the blessed Effect upon my Spirits of having no Secret to brood over, that I have been enabled to reduce the Dose to one sixth part of what I formerly took--and my Appetite, general Health, and mental Activity are greater than I have known them for years past.[4]

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[1]Unpublished Letters, II, 441. Also see above, pp. 13-14.

[2]Collected Letters, III, 127.

[3]See the letter to the Morgans, Ibid., p. 73, and the letter to Mrs. Thomas Clarkson, p. 79.

[4]Collected Letters, III, 128.

Whatever progress was made seems, then, to have been as much a result of Coleridge's admission of feelings of guilt as it was of the Physician's help. "For years" he had suffered "the bitterest pangs of Self-disapprobation" concerning his "habit of taking narcotics." During this brief time, Coleridge was willing to admit his feelings of guilt, and because of this tells Poole in a letter of December 4 that he has known better "Health and Spirits. . .than I have known for years."[1] The problem is, he repeats to Poole, that he has been

> for years almost a paralytic in mind from self-dissatisfaction--brooding in secret anguish over what from so many baffled agonies of Effort I had thought and felt to be inevitable, but which yet from moral cowardice and a strange tyrannous Reluctance to make any painful Concern of my own the subject of Discourse--a reluctance strong in exact proportion to my esteem and affection for the persons, with whom I am communing--I had never authorized my conscience to pronounce inevitable by submitting my case carefully & faithfully to some Physician.[2]

"Brooding in secret anguish" and "self-dissatisfaction" for "years"--these are the phrases used by one who clearly suffered from guilt feelings concerning a habit which he felt as early as 1796 was "reducing" him to "languor and exhaustion."[3]

It is, moreover, only natural to assume that Coleridge would suffer such feelings of guilt about the drug, for it

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[1] Collected Letters, III, 132.

[2] Ibid., p. 131.

[3] See Collected Letters, I, 152.

would seem that he was the kind of man who would readily develop such feelings. Not for naught was Samuel Taylor Coleridge the son of Reverend John Coleridge; throughout his life he was plagued with considerations of ethics, morality, and theology. Biographers invariably mention his close acquaintance with the Bible, and, as James V. Baker points out, "The Bible was a permanent influence on Coleridge's mind."[1] Kathleen Coburn also observes, "The subject of evil is much discussed in Theological Lectures" of 1795.[2] Moreover, many of the notebook entries of 1796 contain excerpts from sermons, the Bible, and other religious works--excerpts which have in common the theme of sin and evil.[3] Coleridge's poem of

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[1]Baker, p. 61. [2]Notebooks, note to entry 161c.

[3]Entry 272 of September-October, 1796, and entry 259 of the same year are especially interesting because of their autobiographical implications. The former contains a fragment of a sentence from a sermon by Jeremy Taylor: "And all vice is a degree of the same unreasonableness; the most splendid temptation being nothing but a pretty well-weaved fallacy, a mere trick, a sophism, and a cheating and abusing the understanding." The latter is a group of phrases from the Psalms:

> bowed spirit
> Deep inward stillness & a bowed Soul--
> Searching of Heart--
>
> feeble & sore-broken
> disquietness of my heart--
> languishing--pour out my soul.
>
> hasten my escape
> My afflicted shouted for Joy--
> My Weak Ones cried aloud--
> O Lord, thou Lover of Souls
> The people of Perdition--

April, 1798, called "Fears in Solitude" interprets the invasion of England in terms of offense against God and man: "We have offended, Oh! my countrymen! / We have offended very grievously!"[1]

It is also interesting to note that Coleridge interpreted the laudanum "debaucheries" of Edmund Oliver, the main character of Charles Lloyd's 1798 novel of the same name, as a reference to himself. In a letter of May, 1798, to Charles Lamb, Coleridge admits that, as he read Edmund Oliver, "some brief resentments rose in my mind." Moreover, Lloyd's assertion that in Oliver's "love-fit, debaucheries, leaving college & going into the army he has no sort of allusion" to Coleridge's experiences, is, insists Coleridge, a "falsehood."[2] As Lowes observes, the identification was, indeed, unmistakable in such passages as Oliver's soliloquy:

> I have at all times a strange dreaminess about me which makes me indifferent to the future, if I can by any means fill the present with sensations--with that dreaminess I have gone on here from day to day; if at any time thought troubled, I have swallowed some spirits, or had recourse to my laudanum.[3]

In his insistence that Lloyd clearly intended an identity between his hero and the poet, Coleridge seems to betray the fact that he considers his own use of laudanum a "debauchery,"

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[1]See Campbell, p. 120.

[2]Collected Letters, I, 404.

[3]Charles Lloyd, Edmund Oliver, p. 245 as quoted by Lowes, p. 599.

a seduction from virtue. It is little wonder that the Coleridge of 1829 could write:

> If I dared dramatize so aweful a part of the Gospel Narrative, I seem to feel that I could evolve the Judas into a perfectly intelligible figure.[1]

Samuel Taylor Coleridge had for so many years felt the oppression of guilt that it was, indeed, a subject "perfectly intelligible."

It is to "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel" which this paper now turns, for it would seem that the previous discussion of Coleridge's opium addiction and his personal feelings toward it have some significance for, and relevance to, both of these major works.

No attempt will be made to discuss the voluminous criticism concerning Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner," for this would, indeed, be a topic far too extensive for treatment here. Rather, the present analysis hopes to show that, although opium could hardly be considered the "creator" of the famous poem, it nevertheless is a source of some of the poem's most striking imagery and, more importantly, the general moral situation which is most basic to "The Ancient Mariner."[2]

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[1]As quoted by Coburn, Inquiring Spirit, p. 164.

[2]Coleridge's own statement concerning the "moral" of "The Ancient Mariner" has, of course, resulted in much discussion--and confusion. In the May 31, 1830, issue of Table Talk, he writes:

> Mrs. Barbauld once told me that she admired "The Ancient Mariner" very much, but that there were two faults in it,--it was improbable, and had no moral. As for the probability, I owned that that might admit some question; but as to the want of a moral, I told

Here again some passages from De Quincey's Confessions would seem appropriate, for their contents are, just as his "architectural" dreams were for "Kubla Khan," very reminiscent of the scenes in "The Ancient Mariner." He writes:

> To my architectural dreams succeeded dreams of lakes and silvery expanses of water. . . . The waters gradually changed their character--from translucent lakes, shining like mirrors, they became seas and oceans. . . . Infinite was my agitation, my mind tossed, as it seemed, upon the billowy ocean, and weltered upon the weltering waves.[1]

The Mariner finds himself in a similar setting: "The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew, / The furrow followed free" until the ship is becalmed and he finds himself surrounded by "water, water, everywhere. . ." At last, for a short time, "Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship" until it again stood still upon a "harbour-bay. . .clear as glass." Just like De Quincey, the Mariner finds himself "Alone, alone, all, all alone, / Alone on a wide wide sea!" Moreover, the old man

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her that in my own judgment the poem had too much; and that the only or chief fault, if I might say so was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader. . . . (See Thomas M. Raysor, ed., Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism [Cambridge, 1936], p. 405.)

It seems, however, that Thomas M. Raysor ("Coleridge's Comment on the Moral of 'The Ancient Mariner'," Philological Quarterly, XXXI [January, 1952]) and Elmer E. Stoll ("Symbolism in Coleridge," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXIII [March, 1948]) are certainly correct in their contention that Coleridge was referring to the specific moral tag at the end of the poem (lines 612-17). Such a passage does seem rather obtrusive, not to mention the fact--which Coleridge evidently recognized--that it weakens the poem with its explicit didacticism. As Stoll concludes, "Coleridge's mere objection to that does not exclude the possibility of a deeper, a more than literal, meaning," (p. 223). Such a meaning the following pages of this thesis attempt to explicate.

[1]Confessions, p. 239.

experiences something very similar to what De Quincey called the "unutterable abortions" of his dreams. The Opium-Eater writes:

> Under the connecting feeling of tropical heat and vertical sunlights . . . I was stared at, hooted at, grinned at, chattered at . . . I was kissed, with cancerous kisses by crocodiles, and was laid, confounded with all unutterable abortions, amongst reeds and Nilotic mud.[1]

And the Mariner relates:

> The very deep did rot. . . (l. 123.)
>
> Yes, slimy things did crawl with legs
> Upon the slimy sea. (ll. 125-26.)
>
> And a thousand thousand slimy things
> Lived on; and so did I. (ll. 238-39.)
>
> I looked upon the rotting sea,
> And drew my eyes away;
> I looked upon the rotting deck. . . (ll. 240-43.)

The parallels are interesting and significant, but they do not seem conclusive enough to warrant Meyer Abrams' contention that "The Ancient Mariner" had "its source and development in Coleridge's opium hallucinations."[2]

Rather, it would seem that the poignancy of the Mariner's situation is that it is closely akin to Coleridge's own: he has sinned, is aware of the sin, and suffers its consequences. "The Ancient Mariner" is, although it is certainly many other things, a personal allegory based primarily on Coleridge's experiences with opium and the guilt feelings he associated with it. An investigation of the poem with these premises

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[1] Confessions, p. 240. [2] Abrams, p. 36.

in mind is profitable and important to the argument of this thesis.

First of all, it is important to note that the focal point for the Mariner's narrative is his killing the Albatross, his committing the crime--indeed, the sin--of killing the "pious bird of good omen." "I shot the ALBATROSS," says the Mariner at the end of Part I; and the action is set in motion. It has already been pointed out that Coleridge referred in later years to his opium habit as a "crime" and "one guilt" from which others arose.[1] Is, then, the Mariner's crime akin to Coleridge's?

There are, no doubt, significant parallels. In the first place, the consequences of the sin are of great magnitude; they are consequences of a sin which, in itself, seems rather innocent. The Mariner killed a common sea bird; Coleridge took a commonly prescribed anodyne.[2] Neither seems to have been at all aware of the significance of his act, an act committed rather casually and without any immediate attempt at apology. Moreover, if the Mariner's action is interpreted symbolically, another parallel is evident. James V. Baker insists that the shooting of the albatross with a crossbow is, indeed, "an highly symbolic action";[3] and Kenneth Burke, in his Philosophy of Literary Form, contends that "A tragedy is not profound unless the poet imagines the crime--and in thus

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[1]See above, p. 53.

[2]Ibid., pp. 16-21.

[3]Baker, p. 208.

imagining it, he symbolically commits it."[1] If the act is thus interpreted as symbolic, the exact nature of the crime need not be of much significance, for it is its symbolic import which is most relevant. Such would seem to be the case for, according to William Wordsworth's prefatory note to "We Are Seven," it was he who suggested to Coleridge that the old man shoot an albatross as his crime. Wordsworth writes:

> I had been reading in Shelvocke's Voyages, a day or two before, that, while doubling Cape Horn, they frequently saw albatrosses in that latitude, the largest sort of sea-fowl, some extending their wings twelve or thirteen feet. 'Suppose,' said I, 'you represent him as having killed one of these birds on entering the South Sea, and that the tutelary spirits of these regions take upon them to avenge the crime.' The incident was thought fit for the purpose, and adopted accordingly.[2]

Hence it would seem rather unimportant whether or not the Mariner's shooting the albatross and Coleridge's taking opium are similar "crimes"--that they are, indeed, considered "crimes" and are thought to "fit the purpose" are the significant points.

Yet, even when interpreted symbolically, it is still possible to see something akin in the two acts. Professor Baker observes that "in Baudelaire's poem the albatross is an imagination symbol." In "Albatros" Baudelaire insists that "Le Poète est semblable au prince des nuées"; in its soaring the giant bird is similar to the soaring imagination of a gifted poet. Hence, says Baker, "The Mariner's crime is a

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[1]Louisiana State University Press, 1941, p. 48.

[2]See Lowes, pp. 222-24.

crime against the imagination. . . ."[1] In the same way, as has been briefly mentioned in this chapter and will be extensively discussed in the following, Coleridge clearly considered his opium addiction as a crime against the Imagination and a crime against "my mental continuity of productive action. . . ."[2]

If, however, one does not choose to accept such an interpretation of the nature of the crimes, it is more evident that the Mariner and Coleridge are similar in their consequent awareness of sin. "The Albatross / About my neck was hung," cries the Mariner; "For years. . .the conscience of my GUILT" had kept his spirit "in anguish," cries Coleridge.[3] Both felt the shame of criticism by friends: the crew hung the bird around the old man's neck, and Southey and Cottle wrote Coleridge berating letters.[4] Coleridge and his Mariner were alike in their awareness of sin.

It is, however, in the consequences of the crime that the parallels are most significant. For both men, the sin resulted in a sense of isolation and loneliness. "Alone, alone, all, all alone, / Alone on a wide wide sea!" the Mariner laments; "for years" Coleridge had struggled against the habit "in secret," alone with the burden of his addiction.[5]

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[1]Baker, p. 178.

[2]Unpublished Letters, II, 441.

[3]Collected Letters, III, 476. Also see above, p. 50.

[4]See above, pp. 49-50.

[5]Collected Letters, IV, 127.

In their guilt and loneliness both turned to prayer, but pray they could not. The Mariner admits:

> I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;
> But or ever a prayer had gusht,
> A wicked whisper came, and made
> My heart as dry as dust. (ll. 245-48.)

And Coleridge writes:

> You bid me, pray. O I do pray inwardly to be <u>able</u> to pray; but indeed to pray with the faith to which Blessing is promised, this is the reward of the faithful.

Both felt what Coleridge called the "Sting of Self-disapprobation."[2] "O God save me--save me from myself," Coleridge cried;[3] "O Christ! / That ever this should be!" cried the Mariner.

Both are well aware of the consequences their acts have had on others. Coleridge speaks of "ingratitude to so many friends who have loved me I know not why"[4] and of "unnatural cruelty"[5] and "barbarous neglect of my family."[6] The Mariner feels himself responsible for the death of "The many men, so beautiful!"; indeed, as each one dies, "every soul, it passed me by, / Like the whizz of my cross-bow!" For "seven days, seven nights" he saw the "curse in the dead man's eye," a grim reminder of the consequence of his sin on

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[1] <u>Collected Letters</u>, III, 478. Also see above, pp. 49-51.

[2] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 135. [3] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 463.

[4] <u>Unpublished Letters</u>, II, 110.

[5] <u>Collected Letters</u>, III, 511. [6] <u>Unpublished Letters</u>, II, 110.

his shipmates. Coleridge wrote that, as a result of pain and opium, "for a fortnight no sleep ever visited my Eyelids"[1] In consequence of his act, the Mariner "Closed my lids, and kept them close, / And the balls like pulses beat," but no sleep came. Part of the torment is the Mariner's thirst; part of Coleridge's is his thirst for the drug.

"Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down / 'Twas sad as sad could be." Evidently as a result of his sin, the Mariner's ship is becalmed; on it he experiences a "weary time" of inactivity. So, too, did Samuel Coleridge experience the periods of irresolution and inactivity attendant on his use of the drug; he was often becalmed, doing "nothing to any purpose. . .excepting Thinking, Planning, and Resolving to resolve. . . ."[2]

And, finally, Coleridge's interpretation of the Mariner's fate as suffering "Life-in-Death" as a result of his sin, is similar to the inexpressible, "dreadful Hell of my mind & conscience & body"[3] which Coleridge himself endures. His poem "Epitaph" expresses such a fate in strikingly similar phrases. Coleridge enjoins the "Christian passer-by":

> O, lift one thought in prayer for S. T. C.;
> That he who many a year with toil of breath
> Found death in life, may here find life in death![4]

EPITAPH

[1] Unpublished Letters, II, 111.

[2] Ibid., p. 104. Cf. Confessions, p. 231. "I seldom could prevail on myself to write a letter; an answer of a few words, to any that I received, was the utmost that I could accomplish; and often that not until the letter had lain for weeks, or even months, on my writing-table."

[3] Collected Letters, III, 478. [4] See Campbell, p. 187.

Much of the poignancy of the Mariner's fate is, therefore, due to the close afinity between the hero of the poem and the poet himself. As a result of their respective sins, both Coleridge and the Ancient Mariner have suffered from loneliness and a sense of isolation, from the guilt of self-degradation and the awareness that their sin has harmed others, from the inability to pray and thus seek relief, from the torture of sleepless nights, from the horrors of "unutterable abortions," from inactivity and irresolution, and from "Life-in-Death." In a very real sense, the Mariner is Coleridge: his sin is Coleridge's sin, and his fate is the poet's fate.

It is evident, as Newton P. Stallknecht contends, that "the Mariner is not altogether free from his sin."[1]

> Since then, at an uncertain hour,
> That agony returns:
> And till my ghastly tale is told,
> This heart within me burns. (ll. 382-85.)

He continues to wander, continues to tell his story, and continues to suffer as he relives it at each telling. Yet, it is important to note that there is a certain kind of resolution of the Mariner's plight at the moment of his blessing the water-snakes unaware.

> The self-same moment I could pray;
> And from my neck so free
> The Albatross fell off, and sank
> Like lead into the sea. (ll. 288-91.)

It has been shown that the basic moral situation which

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[1]Newton P. Stallknecht, "Moral of the 'Ancient Mariner,'" Publications of the Modern Language Association, XLVII (June, 1932), 568.

underlies "The Ancient Mariner" is in fact a situation closely akin to the poet's own; it would therefore seem natural to suspect that the Mariner's act of acceptance is part of the personal allegory of the poem. This would, indeed, seem to be the case, for the snake image in "The Ancient Mariner" is an image which Samuel Coleridge often used in reference to his opium habit. The point can hardly be over-emphasized, for it is important to the present interpretation of "The Ancient Mariner" as a poem of personal allegory and to the explication of "Christabel" which is soon to follow.

To be sure, "Serpents seem to have drifted into the opium tradition, possibly by way of De Quincey's crocodiles," writes Elisabeth Schneider; moreover, they are in her opinion another part of the folklore surrounding the drug.[1] This may well be, but the evidence for Coleridge's associating the snake image with his opium habit is far more than an assumption deduced from the tradition surrounding opium addiction. Such a contention is based on specific references:

In writing to John Morgan of his "long long Habit of the accursed Poison," Coleridge says:

> But though there was not prospect, no gleam of Light before, an indefinite indescribable Terror as with a scourge of ever restless, every coiling and uncoiling serpents, drove me on from behind.[2]

He repeats the image in another letter to the same friend; he

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[1]See Schneider, p. 89.

[2]Unpublished Letters, II, 110.

seeks atonement for

> the direful guilt, that (like all others) first smiled on men, like Innocence! then crept closer, and yet closer, till it had thrown its serpent folds round and round me and I was no longer in my own power![1]

An entry in the Eggerton Manuscript is also relevant here. Coleridge comments on the "very curious description of a singular Thorn-plant" in "Mr. Burchell's Travels in South Africa," a plant which "catches men fast in its branches." Burchell says of it: "The more I tried to extricate myself, the more entangled I became. . . ." Coleridge comments:

> Surely the wit of man could not present a livelier emblem of a Sinner entangled in the snares of a sinful Habit, without love to the Sin, nay with unutterable dread and condemnation of the same, tempted by no expectation, impelled by no desire, but goaded on by the inexorable Want, stung and chased onward by uncontrollable Restlessness, and cowed by the Pain that subsists in the bewildering Dread of Pain.[2]

Here Coleridge sees in the snake-like tenacles of the vicious plant a symbol of a "Sinner entangled in the snares of a sinful Habit"; here again is the same image used in reference to the same habit.

And the Mariner blessed the snakes unaware. He had for the moment accepted their existence, for their beauty was for an instant visible. Earlier they had presumably been part of the rotting sea. Kenneth Burke thus observes that the water-snakes in "The Ancient Mariner" are ambiguous in nature;[3]

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[1]Unpublished Letters, II, 112.

[2]As quoted by Coburn, Inquiring Spirit, pp.37-8.

[3]See Burke, pp. 50-2.

they are both good and evil, both beautiful and ugly, both pleasant and painful. The Mariner's relief, although it is not consummate, comes from his momentary acceptance of the normally loathsome snakes. Thus, it would seem that whatever resolution is present in "The Ancient Mariner" is a result of momentary acceptance of the serpents, acceptance of the very image which Coleridge personally associated with his opium habit! If the Mariner and Coleridge himself are similar in the nature of their sin, in their awareness of guilt, and in the consequences of their act, it would seem more than speculation to suggest that they are indeed alike in certain momentary periods of acceptance, periods when the ambiguous nature of the water-snakes is reminiscent of the ambiguous nature of the "milk of Paradise." Both the snakes and opium are potentially a source of either good or evil, of pleasure or pain. It is just possible that the personal allegory of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is evident even in the momentary act of resolution; at this point in the poem Coleridge would seem to accept momentarily the habit which, in the rest of the poem--and in the most of his life--he was to see as an evil.

"What shall we say of 'Christabel'?" wrote Hartley Coleridge.[1] That, indeed, is the present problem; and problem it is, for the haunting qualities and strange beauty of this

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[1]See Earl L. Griggs, ed., "Hartley Coleridge on His Father," Publications of the Modern Language Association, XLVI (December, 1931), 1252.

poem are almost beyond the limits of analysis. Hartley insists that "it was my Father's favourite child--the fondling of his genius";[1] and yet it is unfinished.[2] William Hazlitt observed, "There is something disgusting at the bottom of his subject, which is but ill glossed over by a veil of Della Cruscan sentiment and fine writing."[3] And yet, the "something disgusting" has been variously called the "sexual basis" of the poem,[4] the "serpent imagery of the poem,[5] and "Coleridge's own vision of hell."[6] The attempt here is but another look at a poem which has been perused for years, a look which it is hoped will prove helpful in accounting for various characteristics of "Christabel."

As this chapter has insisted, the general problem of evil, and the specific problem of opium guilt, were vitally important to Samuel Coleridge. Moreover, a premise of this

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[1]Griggs, "Hartley Coleridge on His Father," p. 1252.

[2]To be sure, James Gillman's biography contains two accounts of a projected conclusion, both of which seem clearly inadequate. The fact remains that "Christabel" stands as a fragment, and the analysis which follows is based only on the poem as it stands, not on a conclusion which was never written. See Beer, pp. 176-7 and 187-88.

[3]From Hazlitt's attack on the "Christabel" volume in The Examiner for June 2, 1816. See The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P. P. Howe (London, 1933), XIX, 33.

[4]See Basler, pp. 38-41

[5]Beer, p. 194

[6]Edward E. Bostetter, "Christabel: the Vision of Fear," Philological Quarterly, XXXVI (April, 1957), 183.

paper has been that Coleridge's poems are intensively subjective and autobiographical. "Christabel" would seem to be no exception. Its theme, in Edward Bostetter's phrase, is the "triumph of evil"; its primary imagery is reminiscent of Coleridge's opium habit; and its fragmentary quality is a result of a personal dilemma which admitted no resolution.

Part I finds the "lovely lady" Christabel walking alone on a "chilly," cloudy night. At a moment of intense stillness reminiscent of the becalmed atmosphere of "The Ancient Mariner," Christabel "sees a damsel bright, / Drest in a silken robe of white, / That shadowy in the moonlight shone." The "lady strange" is "Beautiful exceedingly!" although it is soon evident that she is a "wretched maid" in need of help. Because of Geraldine's beauty and apparently innocent entreaties, Christabel "stretched forth her hand" and led the lady to her father's castle. The ambiguity which Edward Bostetter says "characterizes Geraldine in Part I," is already apparent. Her robe is "white" and yet "shadowy"; she is "beautiful" but "wretched." The first real indication of Geraldine's sinister nature follows immediately as "the lady sank, belike through pain" and "Christabel with might and main / Lifted her up, a weary weight, / Over the threshold of the gate." She, being an evil spirit, is unable to cross unaided a threshold which has been blessed. Moreover, the "angry moan" of Sir Leoline's "mastiff bitch" indicates the presence of a supernatural being, and the "white ashes" burst

into a "fit of fire" as Geraldine walks past. By such light, Christabel first notices "the lady's eye."

As the two enter Christabel's bed chamber, Geraldine cries "with altered voice" to the spirit of Christabel's dead mother:

> 'Off, woman, off! this hour is mine--
> Though thou her guardian spirit be,
> Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me! (ll. 211-13.)

She is, indeed, "altered" in more than voice, for as Geraldine drops her "silken robe,"

> Behold! her bosom and half her side--
> A sight to dream of, not to tell!

Thus the "beautiful" Geraldine is actually horrible to behold. Her subsequent embrace of Christabel is the malignant embrace of an evil which has seduced the unwitting Christabel. And, as Bostetter observes, Geraldine "becomes more unrelievedly malevolent as the poem progresses."[1] To be sure, when they awake in Part II, Geraldine appears fair again; but Christabel immediately acknowledges, "'Sure I have sinn'd!'" The evil nature of Geraldine is again apparent as she later embraces Sir Leoline; here Christabel is conscious of the evil. She sees

> The vision of fear, the touch and pain!
> She shrunk and shuddered, and saw again
> . . .the bosom old.

She turns away, drawing in her breath "with a hissing sound," and instinctively prays. In Bostetter's phrase, the problem now is "Christabel's awareness of Geraldine's evil and her

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[1]Bostetter, p. 193.

helplessness before it."[1]

It is in the dream of "Bracy the bard" that Geraldine's evil influence is symbolically represented as serpent-like. It is the bard's dream which John B. Beer, in his Coleridge the Visionary, calls a "central statement of the poem's imagery"[2]; and it is here where Bracy sees the "gentle bird," the dove called "Christabel," entwined in the coils of a snake. Wondering "what might ail the bird," Bracy advances in hopes of helping the moaning dove

> When lo! I saw a bright green snake
> Coiled around its wings and neck
> Green as the herbs on which it couched;
> And with the dove it heaves and stirs,
> Swelling its neck as she swelled hers!
> (ll. 549-54.)

As Bracy finished the narration of his dream, Geraldine's normally "large bright eyes" suddenly look like a "snake's small eye." "And the lady's eye they shrunk in her head / Each shrunk up to a serpent's eye / . . . One moment--and the sight was fled!" As Christabel observes the transformation, she shudders aloud, with a hissing sound," again sharing in the loathsome characteristics of the evil Geraldine who has seduced her. Moreover,

> So deeply had she drunken in
> That look, those shrunken serpent eyes
> That all her features were resigned
> To this sole image in her mind;
> And passively did imitate
> That look of dull and treacherous hate!
> (ll. 701-06.)

Christabel is capable only of falling at her father's feet

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[1]Bostetter, p. 188. [2]Beer, p. 195.

and entreating him "by my mother's soul" to send away the woman, "For what she knew she could not tell, / O'er-mastered by the mighty spell."

And the fragment concludes with twenty-one lines which seem irrelevant except, as Bostetter observes, for the key phrase, "O sorrow and shame should this be true."[1] Bostetter also astutely summarizes the concluding situation:

> At the end of Part II Christabel is utterly helpless and abandoned and no way of escape from the spell is visible . . . Indeed, the whole pull of the pattern of the poem is toward the further enslavement of Christabel under the spell of Geraldine.[2]

Thus, it would seem that John Beer is certainly correct in his rather casual suggestion that "'Christabel' might represent one of Coleridge's most concentrated and powerful efforts to deal with the problem of evil."[3] It would seem, however, that the real power of "Christabel" lies not so much in its discussion of abstract evil but in the fact that, like "The Ancient Mariner," there is a close parallel between Christabel's situation and the poet's own. Like Geraldine, the character of opium was, at least at first, ambiguous. It relieved Coleridge's pain, prompted moments of "divine repose" and, perhaps, induced visions of "pleasure domes" and "sunny spots of greenery." But, just as in the progress of the poem "Christabel," and in the progress of Coleridge's opium

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[1]Bostetter, p. 194.

[2]Ibid., p. 193.

[3]Beer, p. 177.

habit, the inherent evil soon became apparent. Geraldine's embrace ensnares and seduces the innocently deluded Christabel; Coleridge always insisted that he had been "seduced into the accursed Habit ignorantly."[1] Through the agent of evil, Christabel becomes partly evil; her uncontrolled hissing testifies to the fact. Through the agent of opium, Coleridge saw himself as sharing in the malevolence inherent in the drug; he was "nothing but evil," could "do nothing but evil"[2] under its ensnaring embrace. Indeed, the serpent imagery which Coleridge uses to refer to Geraldine and her relationship with Christabel is akin to that which Coleridge so often used in referring to his drug addiction; the centry imagery of the poem is of central concern in the poet's own life. By the end of the fragment Christabel is aware of the evil of Geraldine and yet helpless before it; in like manner, it has been seen that Coleridge suffered a similar fate as his addiction to opium became more apparent. In short, it would seem that "Christabel," like "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," derives its central situation from the life of its author; it is personal allegory and, as such, is poignant and revealing.

Why, then, was it left unfinished? In the July 6, 1833, issue of Table Talk, Coleridge gives his own explanation:

> The reason of my not finishing "Christabel" is not, that I don't know how to do it--for I have, as I always had, the whole plan entire from beginning to end in my mind; but I fear I could

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[1]For a discussion of the validity of Coleridge's statement, see above, pp. 16-22.

[2]See above, pp. 52-53.

> not carry on with equal success the execution of the idea, an extremely subtle and difficult one.[1]

There is, no doubt, much of the rationalizing Coleridge in such a passage; that the "whole plan" was always in his mind is hardly credible. But, as in most rationalization, there is in it, no doubt, a grain of truth.

From the discussion of the poem just concluded, it would seem that "Christabel" might very well have been left unfinished because the poet could find no resolution to the problem of evil which he had symbolically portrayed. In "The Ancient Mariner" he had been able to momentarily resolve the problem by a kind of acceptance of his sin at a moment when the snakes (its symbol) appeared beautiful and benevolent. But in "Christabel" the serpent-like Geraldine is, by the end of Part II, patently evil and the "pull of the poem is toward the further enslavement of Christabel under the spell of Geraldine."[2] Professor Beer suggests that, had the poem been finished, "the serpent imagery. . .would clearly have appeared again, but with some development to illustrate the subjugation of evil."[3] This, it would seem, Samuel Taylor Coleridge could not do, for "until he had solved the problem of evil in his own life, he could hardly finish the poem."[4] The "idea," the moral situation, which is basic to "Christabel" was, indeed, an "extremely subtle and difficult one." For

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[1]See Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, ed. Thomas M. Raysor (Cambridge, 1936), p. 424.

[2]Bostetter, p. 193. [3]Beer, p. 194. [4]Bostetter, p. 194.

this reason "Christabel" remains a fragment; and for this reason it is, indeed, at once a fragment of unearthly beauty and a poem profoundly based in human life.

# CHAPTER IV

## DEPRESSION, "DEJECTION: AN ODE," AND "THE PAINS OF SLEEP"

Early in his career, young Samuel Coleridge wrote a few "Lines to a Friend in Answer to a Melancholy Letter." In them he admonishes: "Away, those cloudy looks, that labouring sigh, / The peevish offspring of a sickly hour!" He insists that there is much reason for joy in life, for hope even in periods of depression and despondency. In the same image which young John Milton used as a symbol of hope in the concluding lines of "Lycidas," Coleridge tries to encourage his friend:

> Yon setting sun flashes a mournful gleam
> Behind those broken clouds, his stormy train,
> Tomorrow shall the many-coloured main
> In brightness roll beneath his orient beam!

This was the Coleridge of the years before his greatest period of poetic activity; this, the young man who had already experienced the "divine repose" of laudanum, but had not yet felt the oppression of addiction.[1]

And just seven years later came "Dejection: An Ode." Why? Because Coleridge had found that the "milk of paradise" was also a poison of hell.

To be sure, the supposed original "Ode" appears in a letter to Sara Hutchinson dated April 4, 1802.[2] From this

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[1]See above, Chapter I.

[2]See Collected Letters, II, 790-98.

is usually inferred that the poem's mood is a reflection of the disappointment Coleridge was experiencing over the futility of his love for Sara Hutchinson. With this interpretation in mind, it is rather startling to read in other letters that the poem may not originally have been written for Sara Hutchinson at all. In the last line of a long letter to Thomas Poole dated May 7, 1802, Coleridge comments:

> . . .on the 4th of April last I wrote you a letter in verse: but I thought it dull and doleful--and did not send it--[1]

Although it is only speculation, the implication of this letter seems to be that the "Ode" might very well have been first written to Poole and then sent to Sara after Coleridge's decision that it was too "dull and doleful." If this be the case, the personal references to Sara, rather than being omitted in the published version of the poem, may have been added in the version sent her. Be that as it may, a letter to William Sotheby dated July 19, 1802, includes a large portion of the "Ode" introduced by the significant comment:

> In a poem written during that dejection to Wordsworth. . .I thus expressed the thought [of his poetic genius dwindling] .[2]

Here again is the implication that the mood expressed in "Dejection: An Ode" is far more than that of a discouraging amour. Coleridge refers to the poem as having been written

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[1] Collected Letters, II, 801.

[2] Ibid., p. 815.

to three different people. Indeed, it seems that the poet is hardly concerned to whom the "Ode" was written; the dejection he expresses is hardly tied to any one person. With this in mind, the prime importance given to disappointment in love affairs as an index to "Dejection: An Ode" is perhaps overrated.

On the other hand, the relationship of Coleridge's opium habit to the mood expressed in the poem has, it seems, been underestimated. "Dejection: An Ode" would seem to be as much a product of the physical and psychological effects of opium addiction as of unrequited love affairs.

In the first place, "a profound depression succeeds the psychical excitement which opium at first provokes. The subtle well-being which it induces is shortlived."[1] This statement by John Charpentier in his Coleridge the Sublime Somnambulist is not merely the opinion of a layman. Doctor Erich Hesse confirms the fact that intoxication by opium is "usually followed by a stage of depression";[2] for ages past, "opium has rewarded its addicts by brief periods of treacherous well-feeling, and then unspeakable abject misery."[3] And Doctor Lawrence Kolb observes that

> the subsequent depression resulting from long-continued use of the drugs carries the addict as far

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[1]John Charpentier, Coleridge the Sublime Somnambulist (New York, 1929), p. 146.

[2]Erich Hesse, Narcotics and Drug Addiction (New York, 1946), p. 24.

[3]Ibid., p. 19.

> below his normal emotional plane as the first exaltation carried him above it.[1]

In another article, Dr. Kolb explains such depression in terms of the euphoria which precedes it:

> One of the effects of opium is the obliteration of mental conflicts. . . . Under its influence the addict feels free, easy, and contented. . . . The depression that so often follows the withdrawal of opium is in part explained in this way.[2]

Whatever be the medical explanation, the fact is that opium addiction is normally accompanied by feelings of depression and dejection.

Thomas De Quincey wrote that his later opium dreams were

> accompanied by deep-seated anxiety and funereal melancholy, such as are wholly incommunicable by words. I seemed every night to descend--into chasms and sunless abysses, depths below depths which it seemed hopeless that I could ever reascend.[3]

Moreover, in his Literary Reminiscences the Opium-Eater writes of seeing Coleridge in 1808 during the years of that poet's abject depression: "Never had I beheld so profound an expression of cheerless despondency."[4] Just as De Quincey wrote of the pains of opium as well as its pleasures, so he saw in Coleridge's face the "withered" and "blighted" appearance of one who "warned me against forming a habit of the same kind."[5] "Opium, concludes De Quincey, "was certainly the

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[1]Kolb, "Pleasure and Deterioration," p. 701.

[2]Lawrence Kolb, "Drug Addiction in Its Relation to Crime," Mental Hygiene, IV (January, 1925), 78.

[3]Confessions, p. 233. [4]Reminiscences, p. 181.

[5]Ibid.

original source of Coleridge's morbid feelings, of his debility, and of his remorse."[1] And opium may well be a main source of a poem which contains such characteristics: "Dejection: An Ode."

It is also possible that, in addition to being a product of the general depression which follows opium indulgence, "Dejection" is the expression of a mood resulting from one of Coleridge's early, but rather prolonged, attempts to withdraw from the drug. Indeed, there are indications that Coleridge was attempting abstinence during the four months preceding the poem's composition. On January 5, 1802, he wrote Mrs. Coleridge:

> I. . . have been in Bed & unfit to write to you. I say unfit; because I was so low and so unwell, that if I had written, I must either have deceived or depressed you. . . . We cannot get rid of our fault Habits all at once.[2]

Two weeks later, he wrote Daniel Stuart: "For the first 10 days after my arrival at Stowey, I had every evening a Bowel-attack--which layed my spirits prostrate."[3] About one month and just five letters later, Coleridge again mentions that he "was taken very ill with colic Pains & Diarrhoea; & when that went off, one of my old shivery fits came."[4] A letter to Poole on that same day, February 19, 1802, repeats that he "was taken most violently in my bowels" and "seized with a

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[1] Reminiscences, p. 243.

[2] Collected Letters, II, 908.

[3] Ibid., p. 780.

[4] Ibid., p. 785.

shivering fit" and "high fever until 4:00 o'clock" when he finally fell asleep. Coleridge adds in the same letter that he has not had "any occasion for opiates. . .neither did I take them last night."[1]

After this letter comes only one more in February, 1802; none in March; and then the April letter containing "Dejection: An Ode." What is important to note is that these letters contain references to what medical authorities say are among the pronounced symptoms of withdrawal from opiates. Doctor Louis Goodman summarizes in his authoritative textbook which has been so often quoted in this paper: as a result of withdrawal, there is early "sweating, tremor, restlessness. . .followed by insomnia. Weakness and depression are pronounced. Vomiting may occur, and colic and diarrhea are usually prominent."[2] It is just possible that the total absence of letters in March is due to the fact that Coleridge was experiencing the symptoms of a rather prolonged withdrawal, symptoms which are so numerous in January and February letters of that year. In such a period, says Dr. Charles Terry, "The mental depression becomes intense. . . ."[3] With such symptoms, "the feeling of self-consciousness and self-possession is gone, and is replaced by extreme despondency. . . ."[4] Furthermore, Doctor Robert H. Felix points

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[1]Collected Letters, II, 787.

[2]Goodman and Gilman, p. 245.

[3]Terry and Pellens, p. 400.

[4]Ibid., p. 433.

out:

> During withdrawal, added to everything else is real physical suffering or at least discomfort. This situation tends to depress the patient even more and to bring his inadequacies into sharp relief. . . .[1]

And Coleridge wrote "Dejection: An Ode."

It would also seem that many lines of "Dejection" are more meaningful if they are interpreted in reference to the poet's opium habit in both its physical and psychological effects. His is a "stifling Grief"; his "genial spirits fail,"[2] and it is a "vain endeavour" to "lift the smothering weight" from his breast. This is the "weight of dejection" which De Quincey observed "sat upon Coleridge's countenance and deportment";[3] this the "world's weight of incubus and nightmare" which the Opium-Eater observes is the plight of the addicted;[4] this the "weight" which Coleridge in 1812 said was "taken off my spirits by having at length put a Physician in possession of the whole of my case. . . ."[5]

In the poem Coleridge laments: "Change doth trouble

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[1]Robert H. Felix, "Some Comments on the Psychopathology of Drug Addiction," Mental Hygiene, XXIII (October, 1939), 577.

[2]Note that in the poem "Apologia Pro Vita Sua" Coleridge changed the word "tipsy" in the original version to "genial" in the published version. (See above, p. 32.) Perhaps there was such an association here.

[3]Reminiscences, p. 181.

[4]See Confessions, p. 232.

[5]Unpublished Letters, II, 85. The cure did not, of course, succeed, so the "weight" was only temporarily removed.

me with pangs untold / . . .Oh!!--it weighs down the Heart!" "All Pleasure" is but "a dim Dream of Pain to follow!"[1] He is "not the buoyant Thing, I was of yore--." Indeed, "There was a time. . .when hope grew round me,"

> But now afflictions bow me down to earth;
> Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;
> But oh! each visitation
> Suspends what nature gave me at my birth.
> My shaping spirit of Imagination.

Gone are the days when his creative impulse was in happy harmony with the playful wind of "The Eolian Harp"; in its place is the raving wind of the "Mad Lutanist" and his "scream / Of agony by torture lengthened out." Gone is the "shaping spirit of Imagination" which Coleridge considered that important power which "modifies images, gives unity to variety," and "from the excitement of some slight impression generates and produces a form of its own."[2] As Richard H. Fogle observes, "Coleridge had committed the very sin which he most fears against himself; he has mutilated the living organism of mind, destroyed its complex harmonies, and upset its ordered hierarchy. . . ." The contrast, says Fogle, is between "Joy and Imagination which are active agencies by which the mind creates, shapes, and unifies its vision of reality" and "dejection" which is "passive and inert, uncreative and lifeless."[3]

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[1]This line is found only in the April 4, 1802, version to Sara Hutchinson. See Collected Letters, II, 794.

[2]See Table Talk, June 23, 1834, as quoted in Raysor, Miscellaneous Criticism, pp. 435-36.

[3]Richard H. Fogle, "Dejection of Coleridge's Ode," A Journal of English Literary History, XVII (March, 1950), 75.

Much of the poem is, then, what James V. Baker calls "Coleridge's salute or farewell to his imagination. Joy is the lubricant which causes all the faculties to work together. When the poet is cut off from the springs of his imagination . . .then he must say farewell to his plastic power." Baker thus concludes, "For some reason of general frustration in his being, the subterranean fountain was frozen over."[1]

It would seem that a fitting explanation for the "reason of general frustration" is Coleridge's opium habit. Indeed, joy is replaced by a dejection which succeeds opium excitement and/or the "extreme despondency" which characterizes periods of attempted withdrawal. Moreover, as Chapter III contended, Coleridge long considered his indulgence in opium as a sin against himself; he had early felt "disgust and Loathing" as he witnessed the "blighted utility" attendant on his use of the drug. In "Dejection: An Ode" he laments the death of a poet; the death of one whose creative genius had earlier produced "Kubla Khan," "The Ancient Mariner," and "Christabel"; the death of one who felt keenly and pervasively the physical and mental dejection which are commonplace in the histories of drug addicts. "Dejection: An Ode" is Coleridge's most poetic expression of the physical depression, mental agitation, and spiritual dejection which he had partially explored in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel."

Yet, "Dejection: An Ode" can be considered but a prelude to Coleridge's 1803 poem, "The Pains of Sleep." The

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[1]Baker, p. 183.

despondency of "An Ode" becomes in the latter poem articulate "anguish. . .and agony" of a man suffering both physically and spiritually from an affliction which controls him. Elisabeth Schneider's astute observations help to clarify the affinity of this poem and Coleridge's suffering at the time. Not only do "the experiences described in the poem correspond in practically every detail with the numerous account of night horrors in the letters of 1803,"[1] but also the letters of that period "furnish a very complete account of the symptoms of opium withdrawal many years before any of the well-known medical descriptions appeared."[2] In addition to the prominent depression, "colic, and diarrhea" mentioned in the previous discussion of "Dejection," Coleridge suffers most of the following:

> Restlessness, sleeplessness, pain, vomiting. . . sweating, great prostration, dilated pupils, tremors, collapse.[3]
>
> Respiratory disturbance. . .tremor, general debility, and hallucinatory delirium.[4]
>
> Tremor, restlessness. . .followed by insomnia, marked anorexia[5]. . .pain is particularly severe in the popliteal knee-thigh region. . .there are severe muscle tremors, delirium and occasionally mania.[6]

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[1]Schneider, p. 317.

[2]Ibid., p. 62.

[3]Franklin M. Bell, "Morphinism and Morphinomania," New York Medical Journal, XCIII (1911), 681.

[4]Terry and Pellens, p. 459.

[5]"A condition marked by loss of appetite with loss of weight, accompanied by delusions and marked hysterical symptoms," Stedman's Medical Dictionary.

[6]Goodman and Gilman, p. 245.

That Coleridge was in the midst of another attempt at withdrawal is apparent from a letter written as early as February 1, 1803. He wrote: "I abstain. . .from all narcotics & exhilarants, whether from the Vintner's Shop or the Apothecary's."[1] And as late as September 2, just a week before composition of "The Pains of Sleep," the poet wrote Mrs. Coleridge that his health was a little improved "but still my Sleep and Dreams are distressful--& I am hopeless; I take no opiates but when the Looseness with colic comes on. . . ." Another problem has arisen, a respiratory disturbance: "my disorder has taken an asthmatic turn."[2] Two notebook entries of September, 1803, also indicate that Coleridge was suffering from withdrawal symptoms including those of distressful dreams. The first is a fragmentary account of his arrival at Fort William:

> . . .now Darkness came on and I saw only that I was in the same scenery--so on briskly till within a mile and 1/2 of Fort William, when I unfortunately drank / instant Fatigue--pains in my Thighs / arrive at Fort William--Mr. Monro's--to Mr. Livingstone's--hysterical weeping.[3]

A few entries later is a brief sentence traced over several times in ink: "O anything for quiet Sleep."[4] The poet's experiences thus closely correspond to the symptoms well known by today's medical practitioners.

Thomas De Quincey evidently suffered from the same

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[1]Collected Letters, II, 919. [2]Ibid., p. 979.

[3]Notebooks, entry 1487. [4]Ibid., entry 1496.

symptoms whenever he attempted withdrawal from the drug. "During the whole period of diminishing the opium, I had the torments of a man passing out of one mode of existence into another, and liable to the mixed or the alternate pains of birth and death."[1] The culmination of such a period came as De Quincey "awoke in struggles, and cried aloud, 'I will sleep no more!'"[2] And Coleridge writes in "The Pains of Sleep":

> Sleep, the wide blessing, seemed to me
> Distemper's worst calamity.
> The third night when my own loud scream
> Had waked me from the fiendish dream,
> O'ercome with sufferings strange and wild,
> I wept as I had been a child.

In the midst of such torture of mind and body, Coleridge thus wrote Robert Southey on Sunday night, September 10, 1803 :

> . . .my spirits are dreadful, owing entirely to the Horrors of every night--I truly dread to sleep / it is no shadow with me, but substantial Misery foot-thick, that makes me sit by my bedside of a morning and cry--[3]

Then comes the significant sentence which is followed by the original version of "The Pains of Sleep"; "I have abandoned all opiates, but still I can not get quiet rest." Of course he can not, for the abandonment of drugs is the very reason for his restless nights filled with visions of a "fiendish crowd / Of shapes and thoughts that tortured me." Thus, Coleridge's references in the very letter which contains his

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[1]Confessions, p. 247.

[2]Ibid., p. 241.

[3]Collected Letters, II, 982.

original draft of the poem, would seem to confirm the fact which Miss Schneider deduces: "Pains of Sleep" is the account of an addict going through the agony of withdrawal.

Several days later, Coleridge wrote Thomas Wedgwood a letter which contains much of the same information as the earlier letter to Southey:

> I will not trouble you with the gloomy Tale of my Health. While I am awake, by patience, employment, effort of mind, & walking I can keep the fiend at Arm's length; but the Night is my Hell, Sleep my tormenting Angel. Three Nights out of four I fall asleep, struggling to lie awake--& my frequent Night-screams have almost made me a nuisance in my own House. Dreams with me are not Shadows, but the very Substances & footthick Calamities of my Life. . . I am grown hysterical.[1]

What is new in this letter is that the "Dreams" which trouble the poet are "not Shadows, but the very Substance & footthick Calamities of my Life. . . ."; they are autobiographical in nature. They contain the same sense of degradation and feelings of guilt which this paper has suggested were present in most of Coleridge's major poems; such characteristics are strikingly apparent:

> . . .yester-night I prayed aloud
> In anguish and in agony,
> Up-starting from the fiendish crowd
> Of shapes and thoughts that tortured me:
> A lurid light, a trampling throng,
> Sense of intolerable wrong,
> . . .
> Thirst or revenge, the powerless will
> Still baffled, and yet burning still!
> Desire with loathing strangely mixed
> On wild or hateful objects fixed.

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[1]Collected Letters, II, 991.

> Fantastic passions! maddening brawl!
> And shame and terror over all!
> Deeds to be hid which were not hid,
> Which all confused I could not know
> Whether I suffered, or I did;
> For all seemed guilt, remorse or woe,
> My own or other still the same
> Life-stifling fear, soul-stifling shame.
> . . . . . .
> Such punishments, I said, were due
> To natures deepliest stained with sin,--

The references seem quite clear. Here is the "powerless will" coupled with the "stifling" metaphor which is so prominent in "Dejection: An Ode."[1] Here is not only what Coleridge called "a true portrait of my nights,"[2] but also a true portrait of one suffering from feelings of guilt and degradation. The phrases are noteworthy, for they betray the moral--indeed, spiritual--plight of their author: "sense of supplication"; "thoughts that tortured"; "intolerable wrong"; "desire with loathing strangely mixed"; "shame"; "Deeds to be hid"; "guilt, remorse, or woe"; "soul-stifling shame"; "punishments"; and "natures deepliest stained with sin." Here is Coleridge the opium addict suffering not only from the pains of withdrawal but also from the feelings of guilt which accompanied the habit.

A letter to Thomas Poole of October 3, 1803, contains seventeen lines of the same poem preceded by Coleridge's comment:

> God forbid that my worst Enemy should ever have the Nights & the Sleeps that I have had, night after night--surprised by Sleep, while I struggled to remain awake, starting up to bless my own loud Screams

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[1]See above, p. 85.

[2]See Collected Letters, II, 982.

> that had awakened me--yea, dear friend! till my repeated Night-yells had made me a Nuisance in my own House. As I live & am a man, this is an unexaggerated Tale.[1]

In the lines of "The Pains of Sleep" which follow is a couplet which did not appear in either the original or the published versions of the poem: "Tempestuous pride, vain-glorious Vaunting, / Base Men my vices justly taunting--" These lines are, perhaps, a reference to the biting criticism from such men as Cottle, Southey (little wonder they were not in the version of the poem sent him!), and Wordsworth.[2] The line "For all seemed guilt, remorse or woe" is also amended in this version to the similar: "For all was Guilt, & Shame, & Woe--"

In spite of such amendment, "The Pains of Sleep" is a far weaker poem than "Dejection: An Ode." Indeed, its weakness is rather startling evidence that Coleridge's loss of his "shaping spirit of Imagination," which he had lamented in "Dejection," was indeed a fact at least by the time of "The Pains of Sleep." Both "Dejection: An Ode" and "The Pains of Sleep" were cries of physical agony and spiritual anguish, and both would seem significantly influenced by the poet's opium addiction. Nevertheless, in "Dejection" Coleridge was able to achieve what he once noted as a characteristic of Shakespeare's genius: he had united the particular with

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[1] Collected Letters, II, 1009.

[2] See above, pp. 49-51.

the general, the personal with the universal. "The Pains of Sleep" does not share this merit; it is merely personal at a time when Samuel Taylor Coleridge was no longer a poet.

William Wordsworth had in 1802 finished part of his now famous "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality." Here too was a poet depressed, primarily bewailing loss of his power of creativity: "Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?" At this point Wordsworth stopped; and, two years later, added the last seven stanzas which are his affirmation of the benevolence of life and its compensatory merits. Wordsworth had found his compensation in a Neo-Platonic account of the descent and forgetfulness of the soul,"[1] that is, in the realm of metaphysics. To this field also turned the poet who had felt despondency and anguish far more pervasive than had Wordsworth.

Coleridge had hinted in "Dejection" that his "sole resource," his "only plan" lay in the pursuit of "abstruse research"; he was, in the words of a letter of July 19, 1802, "forced. . .into downright metaphysics" by "sickness & some other and worse afflictions."[2] If, as this paper has contended, Coleridge's letters and poetry betray a sense of moral and spiritual wretchedness related to his opium habit, the study

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[1]Alexander M. Witherspoon, ed., The College Survey of English Literature (New York, 1942), p. 727.

[2]Collected Letters, II, 814.

of metaphysics and religion held much promise for the poet. Coleridge's letters immediately following the "Ode"'s composition, and his later writings concerning the Scriptures, seem to indicate just that; unable to cope with laudanum himself, Coleridge turned outside himself and found a kind of consolation.

The poet's letter to Thomas Poole dated May 7, 1802, is the first published letter to appear after the composition of "Dejection." His mood is much the same, but metaphysical inquiries were occupying his time:

> I were sunk low indeed if I had neglected to write to you from any lack of affection, I have written to no other human being. . . . I have neither been very well, nor very happy; but I have been far from idle and I can venture to promise you that by the end of the year I shall have disburthened myself of all my metaphysics.[1]

Two months later a letter to George Coleridge indicates the two topics still on his mind: the flaw in his "moral and intellectual" character; and his religious inquiries:

> It seems as if there were something originally amiss in the constitution of all our family--if that can indeed without presumption be called 'a miss' which may probably be connected intimately with our moral & intellectual characters. . . .
> . . . . . .
> I have read carefully the original of the New Testament. . .My Faith is simply this: that there is an original corruption in our nature, from which & from the consequences of which, we may be redeemed by Christ. . .and this I believe--not because I understand it; but because I feel, that it is not only suitable to, but needful for, my nature and because I find it clearly revealed.[2]

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[1] Collected Letters, II, 799. [2] Ibid., p. 805.

An "original corruption" (that is, sin) may be "redeemed by Christ"--a consolatory note to one who tested its validity by his own need for it and his feeling that it was true. The quotation is lengthy, but of much significance; Coleridge's conclusions are those which provide both a rationalization of the habit and a promise of redemption.

Yet, in spite of his attempts at abstinence, evidence for the poet's continued indulgence during the next ten to fifteen years is over-whelming; even the most apologetic biographers admit that fact. His life continued to be blighted by the opium habit.

However, in April, 1816, just twelve years after "Dejection: An Ode," Coleridge entered the home of Dr. James Gillman on Highgate Hill. Several weeks before, he had met the Doctor and wrote him (with more frankness than he was usually capable of):

> I shall not, must not, be permitted to leave your house, unless with you; delicately or undelicately, this must be done, and both the servants and the assistant, must receive absolute commands from you. . . . The stimulus of conversation suspends the terror that haunts my mind; but when I am alone, the terrors I have suffered from the laudanum, the degradation, the blighted utility, almost overwhelm me.[1]

Under Dr. Gillman's guidance, the poet made great progress in overcoming the habit; as Coleridge recorded in Aids to Reflection, he experienced a "miracle of grace" in a "sudden

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[1]Collected Letters, IV, 630.

emancipation from a fearful slavery."[1]

A "miracle of grace," theological terms used to describe the relief from that which had once been a "soul-stifling shame." These words consoled a man whose poetic genius had given the world "Kubla Khan," whose feelings of guilt and moral plight were explored in "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel," whose death as a poet was lamented in "Dejection: An Ode," and whose cries of anguish were uttered in "Pains of Sleep." He could not, like Wordsworth, add an affirmation to the latter poems within two years; his depression was more than the usual Romantic lament for declining powers. He could, however, express at last a kind of lofty resignation. In manuscripts left unfinished at his death, Coleridge declared:

> I have found words in the New Testament for my inmost thoughts, songs for my joy, utterances for my hidden griefs, and pleadings for my shame and my feebleness.[2]

Samuel Taylor Coleridge could express final acquiescence, for, like the Mariner of his "Rime," he had finally felt the albatross fall from his neck.

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[1]Henry Nelson Coleridge, ed., Aids to Reflection (London, 1840), p. 147.

[2]Henry Nelson Coleridge, ed., The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (New York, 1854), p. 580.

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